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AMONG THE HILL-  
FOLK OF ALGERIA







ON THE MARCH IN THE AURÈS.

Frontispiece.



AMONG THE HILL-  
FOLK OF ALGERIA  
JOURNEYS AMONG THE SHAWÍA  
OF THE AURÈS MOUNTAINS  
*By* M. W. HILTON-SIMPSON

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BEYOND," "LAND AND PEOPLES OF THE KASAI"

WITH 40 ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**O the reader of guide books, of railway time-tables, and of the advertisements of tourist agencies it may appear almost absurd that a traveller should pretend to have anything new to say about a range of wild and barren hills whose western spurs are visible to the naked eye of the visitor to one of the most popular tourist resorts of the whole world; Biskra, the oasis on the fringe of the Algerian Sahara, whose hotels are thronged each winter by hosts of seekers after sunshine and a dry climate.

It may indeed seem incredible to these visitors, as they wander around Biskra's crowded market, or lounge in the beautiful garden of the Château Landon, that less than one hundred miles away, amid and beyond the ranges of barren rocks, whose glorious coloration at sunset fills them with wonder and almost with awe as they gaze to the north-east from the oasis, there are to be found to this day many villages in which a European woman has never been seen, and a white race of natives very many of whose arts and crafts, customs and beliefs have never been described in print.

Nevertheless it is a fact that during our three winters spent in the fastnesses of the Aurès mountains, for such is the name of the hills to which I have referred, my wife has been the first European woman to be seen by the stay-at-home inhabitants of many a remote village,

natives who do not wander to the great centres of civilization, and that we have been enabled to elicit a considerable amount of information as to the manners and customs of the fair-haired Berbers of the hills which has hitherto remained unknown to European students of native life.

The object of our journeys in the winters 1912-13, 1913-14, and 1919-20 was to collect specimens of Berber handicraft for the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford, as well as to glean all possible information upon the life of the people and upon the ancient medicine and surgery which, it was suspected, had been secretly practised in the Aurès for many generations past, and which it has been our privilege to examine in some detail for the first time.

Some of the information we have collected has been laid before various learned societies in England; it is hoped, in due course, to publish the technical results of our work in full.

The present volume, far from attempting to discuss at length the various ethnographical problems presented by the Berbers, constitutes an endeavour to answer some of the innumerable questions as to their life and as to the conditions under which journeys in the hills can be carried out that have been put to us by passing travellers at Biskra, El Kantara, and elsewhere, each time we have come down from the Aurès to rest; questions which show clearly that many a visitor to Algeria would gladly learn more of the life of its natives than a stay in a tourist centre can reveal to him, and that there are many who would undertake expeditions among the hill-folk were they aware of the conditions prevailing in the mountains.

Having wandered up and down all the main valleys of the Aurès massif, visiting many of its remotest hamlets as well as all its larger villages, I have endeavoured in



the following pages so to describe the country that any of my readers who care to undergo the discomforts incidental to travel in such districts may follow in our footsteps, and in addition, for it is hoped soon to construct motor roads through the heart of the massif, to point the way to many interesting and beautiful localities which will, in the future, be accessible to the tourist who indulges in the luxury of a car.

In taking the reader from village to village in the Aurès I have attempted to bring to his notice many of the more remarkable of the customs of the Berbers so that, having accompanied us through these pages in our wanderings in the hills, he may obtain a greater knowledge of the life of this ancient people than he could acquire without spending many months in daily contact with it or by the study of existing literature on the subject, for, although during the seventeen years and more which have elapsed since I commenced my travels in Algeria I have read most of the serious works relating to that country, I have found no detailed description of Berber life in the Aurès in either the French or English languages.

I have omitted in these pages all account of matters of strictly archæological interest.

My work is that of the ethnographer, and I do not pretend to the knowledge which would have enabled me to carry out useful archæological studies in the field, even had I found the time necessary to devote to them amid my investigations of existing native life. I have confined my attentions to my chosen line of research. It has always been my experience that the natives' natural love of hunting provides an avenue by which his friendship can be most easily approached; I have, therefore, at various times done a fair amount of shooting in the area dealt with in these pages, as a result of which

I have ventured to offer to my brother sportsmen some notes upon the sport obtainable in the form of an Appendix ; some hints upon outfit, etc., suitable for the hills forming the subject of another Appendix, which, I hope, may prove useful to travellers who follow in our footsteps in the Aurès.

With the exception of the picture of the drug seller, illustrating Chapter IX, for which I am indebted to a friend, all the photographs in this volume are from our own negatives ; the sketch map which accompanies it is merely intended to enable the reader to follow at a glance our routes upon one of the excellent large-scale maps of Algeria prepared by the French military authorities.

If these pages, penned during a pressure of other work, can succeed in increasing the enjoyment of my fellow travellers by inducing them to visit the mountain homes of the Berbers of the Aurès ; if the picture, incomplete as it must necessarily be in any but a strictly technical work, which I have endeavoured to draw of native life in the hills, can give my readers a clearer insight into some of the phases of that life than a brief visit to Algeria can afford them ; or, especially, if an acquaintanceship with the natives, formed by a perusal of the pages, may lead some future wanderer to study and describe the many points in their manners and customs which are still shrouded in mystery before the slow but steady advance of western civilization has hidden them from us for ever, then the labour expended upon the writing of these lines cannot, surely, have been in vain.

M. W. HILTON-SIMPSON.

# AMONG THE HILL-FOLK OF ALGERIA

## CHAPTER I

### AT THE "MOUTH OF THE DESERT"

A GLANCE AT THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE AURÈS—"THE MOUTH OF THE DESERT"—EL KANTARA AS A BASE FOR JOURNEYS INTO THE HILLS—THE VILLAGES OF EL KANTARA—THE CAFÉS—LIFE OF AN ARAB IN THE OASIS—THE GARDENS—DATE HARVEST—THE SHEPHERDS—FESTIVALS AT THE TOMBS OF SAINTS—AMONG THE ARAB WOMEN OF EL KANTARA.

**I**F we draw upon the map of eastern Algeria a straight line running from north to south from the Mediterranean coast, through the town of Constantine, to a point some fifty miles to the east of Biskra in the great desert, we shall find that the line so drawn, upon leaving the coast, will pass through a region of green wooded hills well watered by its annual rainfall, upon descending from which it will cross the high central plateau of Algeria, some three thousand feet above the level of the sea, the great grain-producing country of the Romans, near the famous ruins of whose once flourishing town of Timgad, it will enter another range of hills before finally descending to nearly the level of the sea in the Sahara.

This range of hills, which more or less continuously forms the northern boundary of the desert from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Gabès on the Tunisian

coast, is divided into various massifs, through the highest of which to be found in Algeria our imaginary line will pass.

The geography of the Aurès itself, the Mons Aurasius of Roman times, is in a sense a replica in miniature of the geography of the country in the same longitude; thus were we to traverse it from north to south we should find that its northern slopes are well wooded, its high central valleys less extensively so, while in the south its few poor streams flow through a tumble of barren hills till they lose themselves in the great desert; in less than sixty miles as the crow flies we should have left behind us forests of pine and cedar, and, after passing through a high country of grey rocks studded with juniper and ilex, suggestive of parts of southern Europe, we should find ourselves at last in Africa, a desert land in whose deep cañons oases of date palms extend along the banks of its streams. This mountainous massif of the Aurès is peculiarly well fitted from its geographical position to be the home of ancient survivals, for it offers to its inhabitants magnificent natural facilities for defence against any invader who might be tempted to subjugate them.

Its steep densely wooded northern slopes, above which the peaks of Chelia (some seven thousand feet above the sea), Mahmel, and Ichemoul gleam white with snow until the spring of the year has wellnigh given place to the fierce heat of summer, offer but scant hope of success to an invader approaching from the level country between Batna and Khenchela, two French settlements on the plateau; the barren rocks which form its southern boundary, those rocks whose ever-changing shades of pink to purple at eventide present to the traveller at Biskra one of the most lovely distant panoramas he will find in Algeria, constitute a barrier which might well daunt any

foe who threatened the country from the desert ; to the east the great ridge of the Djebel Cherehar, between Khanga Sidi Nadji in the south and Khenchela in the north, provides a bastion of defence for the central portion of the range ; while its western border, roughly speaking the valley now followed by the railway from Batna to Biskra, though scarcely so well defined as its northern and southern limits, is rugged and forbidding enough to provide its inhabitants with a magnificent line of defence. The history of the country is precisely what a glance at its geography would lead us to suppose it to be. Rome, doubtless not caring to undertake extensive military operations for the complete subjugation of such an inhospitable region as the Aurès, appears to have been content to protect her granaries on the plateau by means of a permanent camp—the size of the ruins of this camp at Lambèse will show us that she did not despise the wild tribes of the hills ; the great Arab invader of Africa, Sidi Okba ben Nafi, who carried the sword of Islam from the Red Sea to the Atlantic in the seventh century, was defeated and slain by these same tribesmen who, led by their chieftainess Kahena, came down to give him battle in the desert at the spot to the south-east of Biskra near to which now stands his memorial, the oldest mosque in Africa ; the Beys of Constantine, in the days of Turkish rule, held but little sway over the sturdy mountaineers of the Aurès.

Indeed, it would not be too much to say that from time immemorial until the French invasion of the massif in about 1845 the Aurès has never been definitely conquered by the sword, and even quite lately it afforded shelter to a couple of bands of outlaws despite repeated efforts of considerable bodies of troops to effect their capture. What the sword could not accomplish, however,

religion succeeded in attaining; the inhabitants of the Aurès bowed to the faith of Islam, and with the faith they gradually acquired many, very many, of the customs of the East.

But to this day these people have retained most of their physical characteristics. Members of the ancient Berber race, their fair hair, blue eyes, and complexions which are pale beneath the tan produced by the great heat of the African summer distinguish them at a glance from the darker Semitic and negroid types of the desert; while the old Berber language, though no longer written, is still spoken by the Shawía tribes, as the Berbers of the Aurès are called, who have never adopted the Arabic of their new faith.

It was on account of the probability of finding the Berber of the Aurès as little changed as any of his kindred, less so than his Kabyle cousins of the mountains near the coast, who have been more progressive in the adoption of Western ideas, that my wife and I turned our attention to the study of Shawía life in the winter of 1912-13. Owing to the fact that the Shawía tribes, unable, of course, to live upon the barren rocky peaks of their native hills, inhabit the six main valleys of the massif, the valleys of the Wed (river) Bouzina, Wed Abdi, Wed el Abiod with its continuation the Wed Rassira, Wed Guechtan, Wed el Arab, and Wed beni Babar, which run from the high country in the north of the range towards the Sahara, and that these valleys are divided by precipitous ridges passable by but few rough tracks, I considered that the best means of exploring the Aurès would be to select a suitable base in the neighbourhood of the hills and to take from it a series of short journeys of one or two months' duration in each of which we could investigate one particular valley, returning after

each journey to our base to replenish our stores, thus avoiding the necessity of encumbering ourselves with impedimenta for a stay of a whole winter in the hills, which impedimenta implies the use of additional mule transport, as well as giving us opportunities to rest after the unavoidable discomforts of a stay in remote Shawia villages. I found a very suitable base for such expeditions in El Kantara, the "Foum es Sahara," or "mouth of the desert" of the Arabs, Fromentin's "Golden gate of the Orient," where, after rounding the eastern spurs of the great frowning mountain Metlili, upon which the sportsman may try his skill in the quest of Barbary sheep, the train, following the course of an oleander bordered stream, suddenly plunges into a narrow cleft in a red wall of rock, whose precipitous sides tower a thousand feet above the brook, and emerges two or three hundred yards further on into a wide stony valley, revealing to the traveller from the coast at once his first glimpse of real desert and of an oasis of date palms, spread like a deep green carpet at the foot of the rocky ridge he has just left behind him. Far abler pens than mine have described the glories of El Kantara and the ever-changing hues of its barren rocks, at once the ambition and the despair of many an artist, soft in the light of dawn, shimmering beneath the noonday sun, or glowing in all the fiery splendour of the evening; I will, therefore, content myself with describing the place as a centre from which to explore the neighbouring hills and in which to commence a study of native life. El Kantara is peculiarly suitable as a base owing to the fact that Shawia villages can be reached, and thus the traveller's investigations can be begun, at a shorter distance from the railway than is possible from either Batna or Biskra; thus a ride of a short half-day's duration, upon slow-

moving mules, will enable him to reach Beni Ferah to the south-east or Maafa to the north-east, while a shorter ride still will take him to a purely Berber hamlet in the gorge of Tilatou, from which he can return to El Kantara for the night, there being but scant accommodation for a European, however modest his requirements, in its tiny cottages perched like eagle's nests among the crags.

In addition to this, the mules necessary for a journey into the hills are readily obtainable at El Kantara, and, although El Kantara is devoid of any European shops, the stores required for such a journey can be ordered by telephone from Biskra or Batna and received next day by train, while the existence of a post and telegraph office opposite to its little hotel ensures constant communication with the outside world.

The European settlement at the Gate of the Orient, which lies upon the north side of the ridge, through which runs its famous gorge, has little to offer to a seeker after the amenities of social life, for it consists merely in a wayside railway station, a *gendarmerie*, an inn, a small school for the children from these establishments, and a couple of other European households.

The inn, a survival from the old coaching days before the railway to the desert had been commenced, is quite the best in which I have stayed in the course of some years of wandering in Barbary; scrupulously clean, comfortably if simply furnished, providing a plain but excellent table, and personally worked by members of the family of Bertrand, to whom it belongs, the Hotel Bertrand should certainly satisfy every want of the traveller who enjoys its hospitality, and who will remember that he is staying at an inn and not at a great modern hotel, for the individual who expects to find a Piccadilly or a Ritz in a hamlet such as I have described will be



better advised to confine his wanderings to the great highways of European civilization than to seek the nooks and corners of Algeria. Once installed at El Kantara the traveller who is interested in native life will find much to occupy his attention in the three villages that, under the control of one native Kaïd or chief, nestle beside the palm groves on the southern side of the gorge, for the majority of travellers spend but a day or two at the inn, in their haste to proceed to Biskra, so that the three villages have not become mere "side shows" overrun with European visitors, in which much that is native in the life of its inhabitants has given place to occupations called into being by the requirements of the visitors themselves, and the undesirable nondescript who dogs the footsteps of the visitor in most fashionable resorts of the near east is scarcely to be found in the villages of El Kantara ; therefore the sedentary Arab population of an oasis can still be profitably studied without even leaving behind the accommodation of an inn and the facilities of a railway and a postal service.

After passing through the gorge along the highroad which closely follows the track of the railway, and leaving on his right the school built in native style by the French for the Arab boys of the oasis, the traveller quickly finds himself in the main street of the first hamlet of El Kantara, known as the "White Village," whose tiny native shops which border the road to Biskra on either hand, miniature emporiums some twelve feet square, provide the Arabs with almost anything they require of European manufacture, from a length of calico for a woman's dress to a mule's bit, or a packet of unwholesome looking sweets. By still following this road, after crossing an iron bridge over an often waterless river bed, he will in a few hundred yards arrive at the "Black Village," a hamlet possessing little

of interest, beside which a camp of a Senegalese battalion, still occupied two and a-half years after the Armistice, has been built during the war.

Beyond the Black Village the road winds on, skirting the fringe of the oasis, across a stony level plain between the ridge, in which the gorge is the only cleft, and a line of low rocky hills to the south-east, round the spurs of which it wends its way towards the great Sahara at Biskra.

Upon returning to the White Village the traveller will find that, in addition to the main road by which he has passed, it possesses a veritable maze of narrow tortuous lanes between houses built of the same mud and straw bricks which occupied the attention of the Children of Israel in Egypt some thousands of years ago, whose corner-stones not infrequently consist of fragments of Roman masonry, of which large quantities are found when foundations are dug at El Kantara, and that beyond this labyrinth of streets of windowless houses lie the date gardens which extend from the village to the high left bank of the stream.

Wandering along lanes, scarcely wide enough in which to pass a laden mule, leading through the gardens to the river, the traveller whose gaze has so lately contemplated the barren stony desert and rocky hills will probably begin to realize why the Prophet of Islam has chosen a garden as the idea of heaven to place before the desert-weary eyes of his Arabian followers in the sacred Suras of his Koran.

No greater contrast can be imagined than that which exists between the panorama of a desert dancing in the heat of a still powerful sun and the quiet shade of a forest of stately palms, beneath which flourish in fair profusion apricots, almonds, and other fruit trees, clothed

in delicate blossom of white and pink in the springtime, or adding a glorious note of gold to the scene as their leaves assume an autumn tint, whose presence serves to break the otherwise somewhat monotonous beauty of the oasis.

Gardens and a plentiful supply of clear limpid streams ; such is the dream of the sun-scorched thirsty soul in the desert, and these are precisely the reward which the wise old Arabian prophet has promised for ever to the Faithful in the life beyond the grave, adding to his picture of the land of the hereafter the presence of maidens, to whose allure it must be confessed the Arab, and for that matter the Shawia also, are far more susceptible than to the charms of scene and verse, despite the literary tendencies with which some travellers have attempted to endow the usually illiterate dwellers in the Sahara !

Arrived at the side of the Wed el Kantara the traveller will obtain a glimpse of the third hamlet of the oasis, called from colour of the surrounding soil the "Red Village," standing high upon the bank of the opposite shore, amidst its groves of date and fruit trees, commanding a fine view of a bend in the watercourse and of the gorge beyond.

Crossing the river by means of stepping-stones, with the use of which he can dispense after one of the all too frequent periods of drought which afflict this otherwise pleasant land, for the water which comes down from the mountains has usually nearly all been transferred to little irrigation canals to supply the gardens at a point well above the Red Village in dry seasons, he can climb up a steep path to the village itself, and finding his way along its narrow streets, passing a quaint native café as he goes, he will gradually turn northward on a French-made road towards the gorge, re-crossing the stream by

means of an unsightly iron bridge situated a couple of hundred yards below the renovated Roman structure from which the place takes its Arabic name of El Kantara, "the bridge"; then in a few minutes he will have passed northwards through the gorge, in which the wind usually blows chill at early morning and at dusk, and will find himself back again at his inn.

In these surroundings my wife and I commenced our inquiries into the customs of the Arabs of an oasis with a view to comparing them with those of the Berbers of the hills. I have always found that the best means of becoming well acquainted with the inhabitants of an Algerian village is to approach them in the guise of a hunter, for the natives entertain a strong fellow-feeling for the sportsman, and to frequent their coffee houses; when not undertaking expeditions in search of the Barbary sheep and two species of gazelle obtainable in the district, therefore, we spent much time in the consumption of black coffee in the club-like cafés of the Red and White Villages.

There, in the café, a rectangular building of mud-brick, its rafters of palm trunk supported by one or more pillars of the same wood or of brickwork, are to be met with natives of all classes, nomads from the tents of the surrounding desert, Shawia Berbers from the hills, as well as the male inhabitants of El Kantara, who drop in to partake of coffee, their only stimulant, and to pass the time of day with their friends in what is, to all intents and purposes, their club.

Squatting upon mats spread upon the ground amid clouds of smoke from cigarettes, or from juniper leaves smoked in the bone of a goat's leg hollowed to form a tube, the coffee-drinkers indulge in such amusements as dominoes, a form of draughts, or, sometimes, in defiance

of the Prophet, for considerable stakes in games played with highly-coloured Spanish cards.

Often music in the form of the reed and tambourine is provided in the café, while, rarely, an itinerant bag-piper from Tripoli or Morocco delights his audience with sounds remotely resembling those of the Highland pipes, whose strains, recalling a far-off desert home, have brought tears to the eyes of many an Algerian soldier amidst the mud and misery of Flanders.

Very soon we began to make a considerable number of acquaintances in El Kantara; at first among the male population only, for women, other than an occasional danseuse of shady reputation, are never to be seen in an Arab café. The men of the place were eager enough to talk of sport, or of the great desert to the far south, a country in which I had wandered fairly extensively in years gone by, and as the Arab, a dweller in a land of great distances, is very inclined to respect those whose travels have led them further afield in his barren land than have his own, we quickly found that we had interested the natives in us sufficiently to receive many invitations to visit their gardens, or to watch them plying their various crafts. The natives of El Kantara, as a rule, are well-to-do, and many of them own plantations of date palms in the oasis, but to the casual observer it may well appear that very little use is made of the ground beneath the trees, though in some instances beans, red pepper, pumpkins, etc., are to be found under cultivation in the gardens.

The Arab is, in truth, a poor agriculturist compared with the more industrious Berbers of the hills, but a certain excuse for his indolence in this respect is to be found in the fact that although El Kantara, situated some 1,500 feet above sea-level, can be cold enough in

mid-winter, when the wind blows chill from the snow-clad peaks in the north, its rainfall is extremely small, so that the waters of its "Living River," even when swollen by the melting of the mountain snows, barely suffice for the date palms themselves, which, as the Arabs say, require to have "their feet in the water, their heads in the fire" to produce a satisfactory crop.

The gardens of El Kantara are at their busiest in the autumn, the season of the date harvest.

At this time some members of each family, accompanied by their savage jackal-like watchdogs, always pass the night in their plantations to protect the crop from passing nomads, whose attentions to the ripening fruit not infrequently lead to the use of gun or knife.

The picking itself is by no means devoid of danger.

A man, or boy, carrying with him a long cord, climbs the tree, using as a ladder the projections in the trunk made by constant cutting of the branch-like leaves as the tree grows upwards.

Upon arrival at the leafy summit of the tree, from the centre of which hang down great clusters of dates upon branches resembling the mid-rib of the leaf, he attaches one end of his cord to the tree, allowing the other end to fall to the ground.

He then saws off whole branches of dates with the aid of a small serrated sickle, and, calling to an assistant below to hold the cord taut at an angle with the tree trunk, he places each branch as he cuts it across the cord so that it can slide gently to the ground, thus avoiding the shock, and the consequent loss of fruit, which would result should he drop the branch directly from the tree.

The date palm, that great wealth of the desert, is by no means the only source from which the natives of El Kantara derive their prosperity; they are the owners of

numerous herds of goats and sheep, which latter, lean though they are compared with our English sheep, are considered nowadays to approach, if not to exceed, in value even the date palm as a possession. Although the surrounding country is not so absolutely devoid of the poor pasture which serves to keep life in these hardy animals as to force the stock-owner of El Kantara to lead the nomadic life of the Sahara in order to maintain them, it is necessary to take the animals to some distance from the oasis to search for food. This the owner is far too indolent to undertake himself, he therefore entrusts his animals to the care of professional shepherds, often mere boys, who, forming herds of as many as two or three hundred head from the animals of a number of owners, drive them out daily at dawn to feed upon the poor herbage of the desert and the lower hills in the winter, leaving the more plentiful supply to be found upon the higher slopes of Metlili for the summer months, when the great heat will render the animals less diligent in their search for food, and when the scorching plains would be almost unbearable to the shepherd. All day long the shepherds move slowly over the country, their animals feeding as they go, keeping a watchful eye upon any straggler among their charges, for they are responsible for their loss, calling them on with strange cough-like cries, and rounding up a wanderer by means of a well-directed stone often hurled from a sling made of cords of plaited halfa grass. Great vigilance is required to protect the flocks, especially in the lambing season, from the attacks of jackals, which are very numerous in the country round, and whose shrill cry often breaks the silence of the night around the inn at El Kantara, for these creatures are bold enough to carry off a lamb or kid even in broad daylight.

Visits to the cafés and a desire to ingratiate ourselves as far as possible with the natives in order to obtain an insight into their daily life soon brought to our notice an oft-recurring festival both at El Kantara and in the hills, namely, a subscription feast on the anniversary of the birth or death of some local Moslem saint. All mosques in the country are built to the memory of some native who, owing to his blameless life or to a reputation for performing miracles—frequently to a combination of the two—has been deemed worthy of inclusion in the endless lists of the Mohammedan “marabouts,” and who sleeps his last sleep in a tiny chapel in the building, while those lesser saints, whose memory has not been perpetuated by the erection of a mosque, repose each within a form of mausoleum, which varies considerably in design according to its locality, those at El Kantara and in centres such as Batna and Biskra usually consisting of a small rectangular building surmounted by a dome or cupola, known in Arabic as a “kouba,” while in the poorer villages of the Aurès a mere rectangle of stones, without any roof, or a whitewashed conical heap of baked earth may serve to mark the last resting-place of a minor saint.

Some of the more important of these “marabouts,” whose character we will examine more closely when we visit a living example in the hills, are revered throughout a wide extent of country, while even a lesser holy man possesses long after his death a considerable local following of natives who consider him their patron saint, who worship in the mosque erected to his memory, or who bring candles and incense at certain times to burn in his “kouba,” or in the recess which is usually provided for the purpose in the tomb of even the meanest saint. As the anniversary of a marabout draws near a subscrip-





“ THE MOUTH OF THE DESERT.”



A FEAST AT THE TOMB OF A SAINT.



tion is opened in the village to provide a meal upon the day for all his followers in the neighbourhood.

Each household contributes according to its means; thus a wealthy stock-owner may present one or more sheep, a well-to-do shopkeeper a sum of money, a poorer person a quantity of barley, while the very poorest will contribute something, even if his gift should consist only of a little red pepper to flavour the dishes, though inability to bring an offering does not debar the destitute from the forthcoming feast.

Upon the day appointed all the male followers of the saint repair to his "kouba," or his mosque, accompanied by a number of women, whose duty it is to cook food in the shape of stews of meat and "kuskus," or steamed semolina, in the courtyard of the building, or some adjacent spot, the flat loaves of unleavened bread meantime having been placed in the little chapel, heavy with the scent of burning incense, beside the raised tomb of the holy man, which is decked with gaudy muslins and hung round with brightly coloured silken flags, in order that some of the "baraka" or holiness of the illustrious dead may enter into them, and thus be absorbed by his devotees when the food is eaten. The crowd, especially its younger element, many of which have been commissioned to carry home dishes to their mothers and sisters, who in many cases in an Arab community would not attend in person at the mosque, not infrequently becomes unruly, so that a doorkeeper, armed with a thick stick (which he does not hesitate to use) and a fine flow of language, such as we should consider singularly inappropriate to a place of worship, has no small difficulty in regulating the traffic in such a manner that the incoming throng of devotees, as hungry for the food as they are for any blessing it may contain, does not trample under foot

those who are attempting to take some of the sacred meal home to their relatives.

The European traveller will experience no difficulty in visiting any of the mosques at El Kantara or in the hills ; as a rule, however, they possess little or no architectural charm, and usually consist of a bare whitewashed apartment, its roof supported upon palm-stems or pillars of mud brick, a niche in the wall indicating the direction of Mecca, to which the Moslem must turn in prayer.

The minaret, the tower from which the long-drawn wailing cry of a mosque official summons the faithful to their devotions in all the large Algerian towns, is by no means always to be found upon the mosque in the hills, and at El Kantara in the majority of mosques, of which the oasis possesses several, the muezzin, as the official is called, stands upon the flat roof to utter his call in the absence of a tower from which to deliver it.

Mingling daily with the natives in their cafés, at their festivals, or in search of sport, we had not long to wait before opportunities presented themselves, in the shape of invitations from various friends, of seeing something of the life of the Arab women in a desert oasis, opportunities which were valuable enough to us as enabling us to compare their existence with that of their Berber neighbours in the hills.

My wife was the first of us to be allowed to enter the house of one of our friends. It is easy enough for travellers in a large town to find a "guide" who will take them into his house or that of a friend whose ideas of the sanctity of home have undergone considerable modification as a result of the veneration of western civilization to be found upon many of these gentry, and whose female relations have been schooled in a suitable manner of receiving European guests, but such opportunities

were not those that we were seeking; we wanted to become really friendly with a few households so that we could gradually proceed to inquiry into matters relating to superstitions, etc., which, of all subjects, are best known to the women-folk.

The women of El Kantara, despite the number of travellers who annually visit the "Foum es Sahara," were by no means so familiar with the appearance and costume of European ladies as might be expected, for while they are scarcely kept in such prison-like seclusion as the women-folk of wealthy town-dwelling Arabs and are not veiled as are the rich women of Algiers, they rarely leave their homes, especially when in possession of their youth and beauty, except for some definite purpose, such as bringing in heavy goatskins of water, or washing clothes in the stream, when they stamp with rhythmic tread upon the soap-sodden cotton dress material placed upon a boulder beside the brook, gossiping the while with friends similarly employed and usually watched over by some relation of their husbands, a toothless hag who would not hesitate to make mischief should a young wife throw too many inquiring glances at a passing European.

Thus the women, especially the younger ones, were by no means averse to making the most of an opportunity of critically examining a European lady's appearance when my wife was taken to call upon them. As a rule their curiosity on these occasions did not manifest itself until the head of the family, who had brought in the visitor, saw fit to withdraw, for nothing will more surely damp the enthusiasm and generally cramp the style of an Arab woman than the presence of her lord and master, but when once the husband's back was turned the atmosphere became clearer, and my wife, between gulps of milk,

often sour and always tasting strongly of the goatskin in which it had been kept, or mouthfuls of honey and dates pressed upon her by her eager hostesses, had to reply to a regular bombardment of questions. Why did she wear so little jewellery? Had she more at home? How many children had we? Why had they not accompanied us to Africa? Why did she wear such dull garments as her skirt of tweed? Had she made the cloth herself? How much had she paid for everything she had about her? These are but a very few of the inquiries made at every native house she visited in Algeria, her replies, intended to be intelligent answers to the questions, often evoking roars of laughter from the assembled women, the fact that she never wore earrings and was unable to weave cloth for her skirt being considered remarkably droll.

Scornful though they doubtless were at my wife's ignorance of many of their most ordinary occupations, the women of El Kantara never tired of receiving her visits, and gradually, often as the bearer of some simple remedy from my medicine-chest for a sick child, I too gained access to many of the households in which, when once I had been introduced by the head of the family, I was always welcomed with my wife (though I would never visit a house without the chaperonage either of my wife or of one of its male occupants): indeed, I believe that in certain families, whose men-folk are often away, I am the only male person of any race who has the entrée to their homes in their absence. We may, perhaps, examine in some detail the dwellings in which the women of El Kantara pass the greater number of their days, secluded as far as possible from the gaze of their neighbours, for these dwellings, while similar to those of the oases in the great Sahara, will be found to differ very

considerably from the houses of the Shawfa in the hills. Windows in the outer walls of an Arab house are conspicuous by their absence, the temptation they would offer to some fair member of the family to see—and be seen—by means of them would probably be so strong as to cause a gross breach of Mohammedan etiquette; the streets, therefore, present nothing to the eye but a long vista of sun-baked mud walls, broken here and there by portals, the doors of which are almost invariably closed and barred in a manner which might seem to belie the reputation for hospitality enjoyed by the followers of the Prophet.

Having reached the entrance to a house which we have visited before, we beat upon the door and shout: "Oh, Fathma, open the door." At first no notice may be taken of our summons, but in a moment or two a voice from within will inquire our business, and in response to our "It is no one but Simsim and his wife" (for a European prefix to a name has no place among the women) the door will be opened a little to allow us to slip through, yet not exposing the opener to the gaze of passers-by. Once inside, and the door closed quickly behind us, we find ourselves as a rule in a sort of inner porch or a vestibule, often provided with a bank at one side to sit upon, which communicates directly with a courtyard, occupied at night by the animals, or in a large unfurnished room, which is used for the same purpose; the other apartments, built upon no special plan, a room being added here and there as required, open on to the courtyard. These apartments are dark and dingy in the extreme, for they are lighted only by the open door, their mere slits of windows high up in the wall admitting but the faintest glimmer from the courtyard, and they boast nothing which can be dignified with the name of furniture.

On one side a hand-loom for the weaving of burnouses and the silk and wool haïks or shawls, which the women of El Kantara make in fair quantities for sale, will usually be found rigged up close to the wall ; in a corner, below a hole in the roof serving as a chimney, a heap of ashes, in the midst of which are three smoke-blackened stones, upon which to rest the stew-pot, marks the fireplace, and from the roof at hand may often be found suspended a hoop of bent sticks to which a piece of network is attached, the easily rocked cradle of the Arab child ; the bedding of the whole family, consisting of a halfa mat and a tellis or two (home-made sacks of goat's hair for carrying merchandise on muleback) to lie upon, with one or more brightly coloured blankets as covering, lies in a tumbled mass upon the mud floor, or upon a platform made of date-leaf stems, supported by wooden posts, raised between two or three feet from the ground to protect the sleepers from scorpions, which, in the summer only, are unpleasantly common in the houses as well as beneath the stones of the desert, and whose bite not infrequently proves fatal to a victim who is not in the best of health.

Near the fireplace a tripod of stakes supports a dripping goatskin of water, while a similar skin containing milk and suspended in the same way, so as to be easily swayed to and fro, forms the churn for making butter, which, to the Arab taste, is more palatable in a rancid state after weeks, or even months, of storage in a goatskin than upon the day in which it is churned. The nooks and corners of the family apartment are choked with an indescribable medley of objects ; saddles, bridles, sacks or huge amphora-shaped wicker baskets of grain, a quern or hand-mill for grinding corn (of a twin stone type to be found in the Highlands of Scotland), old clothes, heaps



of juniper logs for fuel, and bundles of dry date leaves with which to kindle the fire are but a few of the articles to be found strewn upon the floor, while from wooden pegs driven anywhere into the crumbling walls are hung the cooking utensils, earthen bowls and dishes made by the Shawia, or by the housewife herself, tin pots of European manufacture, plaited halfa funnels for filling the water-skin at the brook, and even in the poorest houses one or two china coffee-cups with which to honour a guest. In addition to the human members of the household, cats of a leanness which must be seen to be believed, goats, kids, chickens (and their usual unpleasant associates) wander all over the room.

Such are the conditions in which live the poorer families of El Kantara, or families, which as is not infrequently the case, share a house with their relations.

More wealthy people will cook and spend the day in one large room, retiring to another apartment for the night, while their grain, etc., will be kept in a separate storeroom.

Many houses have additional rooms on the roof, which is reached by means of a palm-stem notched to form a ladder, and in these rooms the branches of dates are usually suspended to ripen after the harvest and for storage.

The flat roof itself, surrounded by a parapet, is much frequented by the women, the parapet serving the purpose of the garden wall of cheap suburbia, a medium for scandal and gossip rather than a safeguard to privacy.

It is not good manners for the male visitor to go upon the roof unless specially invited to do so, which he will not frequently be, for in so doing he may show himself to the curious gaze of the women of neighbouring households to which he has not been invited, and thus,

though his gaucheness will be attributed to his ignorance and passed over in silence by his host, he may unwittingly be the cause of some young wife "next door but two" receiving a pretty severe talking-to, if not a thrashing, from her husband should he hear of her curiosity, a man I know having actually broken his sister's arm as a result of seeing her peep at strangers over the parapet!

We have already seen that the male population of El Kantara and, for that matter, all Saharan villages pass their days and much of their nights in the café, returning home merely to eat and sleep; family life therefore, as we understand it, can hardly be said to exist in the villages of an oasis, there being little to attract the husband in the dingy surroundings we have attempted to describe above, surroundings which, however, are considered quite sufficiently comfortable in which to imprison that inferior animal—woman. While the Arab can be an affectionate husband *for a short time* to a young and pretty bride, and is usually a far too lenient parent to his sons, how does he regard the female sex in general?

Though it is admittedly impossible for the European to comprehend fully the inner workings of the oriental mind, we can fathom to some extent the Arab's idea of the gentler sex when we remember that in his own tongue the native finds it necessary to apologize should he use in conversation the name of that, to the Moslem, loathsome animal the pig, and that a similar apology should always follow the mention of the word "woman," an association of ideas which gives us some clue to the state of degradation from which the Arab woman, of the poorer classes at least, has never been able to rise.



A PIPER OF THE DESERT.



ON THE ROOF.



## CHAPTER II

### AMONG THE HILL-FOLK

A START INTO THE HILLS—BENI FERAH, A BERBER VILLAGE OF THE AURÈS  
—PRIMITIVE POTTERY—AN ANCIENT SYSTEM OF IRRIGATION—A  
“WATER-CLOCK”—A RAIN-INDUCING CEREMONY—THE “SORCERESS  
OF THE MOON”—A WEDDING AT BENI FERAH.

HAVING become acquainted with the Arab inhabitants of a desert oasis, we turned our attention to their Berber neighbours of the hills. The first Shawia village in which we stayed long enough to undertake any investigation of the habits of the people was Beni Ferah, some twelve miles as the crow flies to the south-east of El Kantara. A day or two before our departure from the little hotel a native mounted orderly from the administrative headquarters of the district joined us in order to assist us in procuring the baggage animals necessary for the journey and to accompany us in our wanderings only in the area over which his administrator held sway, for, upon leaving this administrative district, we were to be accompanied by another orderly from the headquarters of the area we should then enter.

The French authorities have always been good enough to lend me the services of such an orderly during my various expeditions in the Aurès in response to a request from a learned society in England to further the interests of my work, and these services have proved invaluable. The presence of the orderly, who invariably knows every inch of his area, and is personally acquainted with most

of its inhabitants, does away with the necessity of employing a "guide," who is not infrequently nothing but a plausible hanger-on from a tourist centre and quite ignorant of the country beyond the beat of the ordinary tourist, indeed it has always been our rule to employ no servants whatever, other than the drivers who accompany our pack mules for the days upon which we are actually moving from village to village, for the blue burnous with its red trimmings of the native orderly, his official uniform, is a certain passport to the hospitality of the Kaïds, as the chiefs are called, or the headmen in the case of small villages, who will always place a room at our disposal and provide us with food cooked by their wives, so that all the "housework" necessary consists in merely unrolling our sleeping valises and cooking upon a spirit lamp any small additions we may require to the fare offered us by our hosts, services which we prefer performing ourselves to delegating them to a number of hired and often undesirable loafers from a town. Indeed it has been my experience that the more the traveller can do for himself the more he is respected by the natives, and that the people of both the desert and the hills regard with a certain contempt one who requires a host of servants to look after him, although obviously a number of followers are required should it be necessary to camp out away from a village. The assistance of a uniformed representative of the Government has an excellent effect upon the prices asked for mule transport, and for anything the traveller may require to buy, and, in addition to his other uses, he provides a most valuable interpreter, for all these "dcïras" who have accompanied me speak the Berber language of the Shawïa as well as Arabic, indeed those I have employed in the remoter parts of the Aurès have been Shawïa themselves.

It may be objected that the presence of a Government servant might arouse the suspicions of the people, and cause them to be especially reticent with regard to many of their customs.

I have not found this to be the case. The orderlies are natives first and officials afterwards; they are well acquainted with what goes on in the villages, but are by no means anxious to interfere with the liberties of their own people by objecting to various practices which, while outside the letter of the law, they would, and probably do, indulge in themselves.

The first *deïra* we employed has accompanied us upon several subsequent expeditions. Belkadi ben Hamou has grown old in the service of the French. Of a kindly, if somewhat fussy, disposition, he took over both moral and physical charge of us from the moment he first joined us at El Kantara, and to this day I am convinced that he regards us as a couple of headstrong children, who would be certain to get into mischief or hurt ourselves should he allow us for a moment to stray beyond the reach of his ever-watchful glance.

A visit to the *Kaïd* of El Kantara resulted in his promise to secure for us the two riding mules we should require, as well as the two animals necessary to carry our kit, so that early in the morning upon the day appointed for our departure the animals duly arrived at the hotel, and our rolls of bedding, a couple of suit cases and two wine-boxes of provisions were placed in nets of halfa-rope, laid across the pads on the mules' backs to receive them, or stuffed into home-made goats' hair sacks, called in Arabic "*tellis*," in which grain, etc., is carried in Algeria.

Our baggage having been loaded up we mounted, Belkadi riding his own young horse, and followed our pack-mules southward through the gorge.

Upon passing through the gorge of El Kantara we left the Biskra road and turned eastwards across the wide stony valley towards the range of low rocky hills, which, as we have seen, lies to the south of the oasis, up whose steep slopes we slowly wended our way till, on arrival at its crest, we enjoyed a magnificent panorama of wild snow-capped mountains to the north and, a short distance farther on, of the foothills which fringe the great desert to the south-west, distant barren ranges of whose wonderfully delicate shades of blue, purple, pink, and grey nothing save the brush of a great artist can convey the slightest impression.

Crossing a high-lying level country, studded with dwarf juniper trees, the glorious panorama of the Sahara and its foothills always visible on our right, we reached Beni Ferah after a march of about four hours, moving always at the walking pace of our baggage mules.

This journey can be very cold, especially upon the slopes of the rocky hills. Indeed, on one occasion in February we encountered there a north-easterly gale, bringing with it sharp seeds of sleet, which was far more suggestive of northern Europe in winter than of the fringe of the so-called burning Sahara, but on the occasion of our first visit the weather was normal, that is to say, sunny and warm, without any approach to unpleasant heat.

Soon after coming into sight of the village, standing upon a rocky knoll, with its gardens spread along the course of a stream below it, we passed a few dwellings, forming an outlying hamlet, and the ruins of a tower which had served as an outwork of defence in the troublous times before the French occupation of the country, and descending sharply to the bed of the stream, which barely damped the fetlocks of our mules, we ascended



a lane, suggestive of a flight of broad steps, round the steep side of the knoll, and so entered the lower portion of the village, through the narrow streets of which we wended our way until, having passed round the knoll upon which it stands, we emerged into the level lower ground beyond, and halted at a café, beside which a venerable olive tree has afforded shelter from the sun in spring and summer to the members of the "djemaa," or village council, for many generations gone. At the café we were received by the Kaïd, a somewhat unprepossessing looking individual, whose looks, indeed, did not belie him for, a year or two later, finding himself in some doubt as to the final issue of the great war, he had safeguarded such public funds as were committed to his charge by departing with them for some unknown destination, whence he has not yet returned, and another now reigns in his stead.

Whatever his real character may have been, however, he received us cordially enough, and, after partaking of the usual refreshment at the café, he conducted us to a room in his own house a couple of hundred yards from the village, which he reserved for such visitors as came his way—an occasional official touring in the district, or the not very welcome gatherer of taxes.

This room boasted a few articles of European furniture, mostly in a state of disrepair, such as a bedstead, a table, and a chair or two, so that in a very few minutes we had settled down in our new surroundings and were partaking of a fairly well cooked meal prepared by the family of our host.

It was apparent the moment that we commenced to explore Beni Ferah, or Aïn Zatout as the natives call the place, that it was no Arab settlement we were examining. Its cluster of small houses huddled together

upon the steep eastern slope of the rocky knoll, from the summit of which a little mosque looks down some couple of hundred feet sheer to the brook below it to the west, were very different from the dwellings at El Kantara, for, although some of the newer buildings scattered about the lower ground boasted upper stories of mud brick, thus displaying a certain Arab influence in their construction, the older huts on the hill-top were entirely built of rough stone in the style which we soon learned to associate with a Shawíá village, while the merest glance at the people around us showed us clearly that we were now in the land of Berbers. A very large proportion of fair (sometimes golden) hair, blue eyes, and complexions, especially in the case of young children, who lack the tan produced by years of exposure to the fierce heat of the summer sun, often paler than our own, were the physical characteristics which at once arrested our attention, while their strange Berber tongue, akin to that spoken by the Kabyles in the north, bore no resemblance to the Arabic of the nomads and of the oases of the Sahara.

Another outstanding difference between Beni F'erah and an Arab settlement immediately forced itself upon our notice. Everywhere, in the streets, on the roofs, sitting about outside their houses, coming and going without attempt at concealment, were numbers of women and girls.

Although the Berbers have embraced the faith of Islam, their women enjoy a freedom quite unknown to their Arab neighbours, and we soon found that we should not lack opportunities of talking to them and watching them at their various occupations, many of which, for example, pottery making, are carried on outside their homes in the full view of the passer-by. This pottery

making is quaint if simple, and constitutes a survival of a very early art.

Nearly every Shawia woman is capable of manufacturing such earthenware utensils as she requires for her own home, but at Beni F'erah, where earth can be found which is peculiarly suitable to the potter, a large number of milk-bowls, stew-pots, large flat dishes, etc., are made by the women for sale to the nomads of the desert in Biskra market and in the neighbouring oases.

No tools whatever are used in their manufacture, the Berber woman simply fashioning the moistened clay with her hands, attaining really remarkable symmetry of form in the simple models she adopts, leaving the pots when made to dry in the sun. When nearly dry she polishes them with a snail-shell, or a smooth round pebble, to produce an even surface inside and out, and proceeds, in many cases, to decorate them with criss-cross or lozenge patterns, each with its own name and significance, by means of a reddish earth moistened and applied upon a blade of halfa grass doubled back to serve as a brush; and, finally, when the sun has hardened the pots, she combines with one or two friends, who have each made a number of articles, to bake her pots outside the village, where no danger exists of setting fire to neighbouring buildings.

A pile of stones is made upon the ground, the pots being carefully laid upon the heap and covered with brushwood, old halfa grass sandals, the sweepings of the houses, etc., which is then ignited and the fire maintained for a couple of hours, after which the heated vessels are carefully removed with the aid of sticks, and a coat of shellac is applied to the inside of them, and sometimes to the outside as well to form a very rough ornamentation, while the pots are still too hot to be touched by hand.

The women displayed no embarrassment whatever when we approached to watch them plying the potter's trade, and we soon began to make friends among them and to learn something of their methods. The Shawia woman has a very shrewd head for business (indeed, I would rather bargain with a number of Arab men than with one obstinate old Berber woman), as we discovered when collecting specimens of pottery at Beni Ferah.

In 1913 we obtained as many pots and bowls as we wanted at prices varying from ten to twenty-five centimes each; in 1919, however, "owing to the war," one franc was scornfully refused for exactly similar pots made by the same woman from the same earth, for the manufacture of which an infinitesimal quantity of shellac was the only material that she had purchased, and this despite the fact that, should I not buy the pot, there would be no one to follow me with a longer purse, or a more gullible disposition, with whom a better bargain could be driven.

War profiteering is an occupation to which the Berber women have taken very kindly indeed!

The gardens of Beni Ferah, which stretch away to a considerable distance along the course of the stream to the south-west of the knoll upon which the main part of the village stands, differ considerably from those of a desert oasis, for while apricots, walnuts, olives, figs, quinces, etc., grow in profusion, the comparatively few date palms are of an inferior quality owing to the greater altitude of the village above the sea and the corresponding decrease in the temperature.

The vegetable plots of Beni Ferah are much more neatly kept than those of El Kantara, for the Shawia are better gardeners than the Arabs, and are far more numerous owing to the greater annual rainfall they enjoy, but nevertheless in the spring and summer the



A SHAWIA POTTER, BENI FERAH.



FIRING POTTERY AT BENI FERAH.



gardens of Beni Ferah are entirely dependent for their water supply upon their stream, often reduced to very small proportions in the driest part of the year, the resources of which are husbanded with the greatest care.

The system of irrigation in use at Beni Ferah is that which obtains all over the Aurès, and, as its study brought to our notice a very quaint method of measuring time, we may examine it in some detail. At a point situated some distance above the gardens the river is tapped by means of a barrage, often consisting merely of a line of boulders so placed as to deflect a certain amount of the stream into a narrow canal, known in Algeria as a "seggia," by means of which it is conducted through, or rather beside and slightly above, the land to be cultivated, each garden possessing its own branch channel from the main "seggia" by means of which it can be flooded in its turn. This simple system of canals must be of great antiquity, indeed at El Kantara and in certain parts of the Aurès "seggias" cut in the solid rock dating from the time of the Roman occupation of Algeria are in constant use to-day, while disused channels at an altitude far higher than any now employed show that in ancient times the country enjoyed a greater rainfall and, in consequence, more abundant streams, so that a considerably larger area in its valleys was kept under cultivation than is possible now.

When a garden is purchased the buyer must acquire, also by purchase, the right to a supply of water according to its size; thus an extensive property may require the uninterrupted flow of all the water in the canal which irrigates it for one whole day in the week, while another may only be allowed one or more hours of irrigation in the same period.

The stream is tapped by more than one main "seggia,"

and the flow of water is turned into these in turn. Upon the day on which any given "seggia" is to be used the owners of the various gardens situated beside it assemble and, repairing to a point overlooking the gardens, proceed to divide the flow of water between them.

So precious is the liquid that even a few moments more or less in the period of its flow into a garden is of considerable importance, the Shawia therefore mistrust the employment of modern watches, whose rate can be dishonestly adjusted, as a means for measuring the time for which each owner is entitled to the flow of the canal.

Instead, they make use of a system of measuring time which must be of very great antiquity, and has probably persisted in this land of survivals for countless generations in company with other strange customs of the Shawia.

A member of the village council accompanies the landowners, bringing with him a large earthen bowl, or metal pail, of water, and a small copper bowl, the bottom of which is perforated with a very minute hole; at the moment when the mud wall of the "seggia" is cut through and the water allowed to flow into the first garden the councillor carefully places the perforated bowl, the property of the village council, and therefore the legal measure, upon the water in the pail, watching carefully for it to sink, which it will do in about fifteen minutes, and refloating it again immediately it does so. Thus each landowner is entitled to three, four, six, or eight, as the case may be, sinkings of the copper bowl rather than to any given number of actual hours or portions of an hour, and, as the time approaches when the flow of water into a garden is to cease, a neighbour in the little group of landowners will shout to an assistant in his





A. WATER-CLOCK.



BRINGING HOME THE BRIDE.



garden below to be ready upon the instant to cut open an inlet into his land in the side of the "seggia" as soon as the bowl has sunk for the last time in the series allotted to his friend, who at that moment will cry out to a man in his garden to stem the flow of water he has been receiving by filling up with mud the hole through which it has been running.

Each landowner being present in person, and the fact that the measuring is done by an elder with the official bowl, appears to ensure that this quaint old-fashioned method of measuring time gives satisfaction to all concerned.

The lack of a sufficiency of water, which has called into use the water-clock just described, also tends to maintain in existence an old custom connected with prayer for rain which may well have existed in Algeria for countless ages before the arrival of the Mohammedan faith, and which, when once we had observed it, helped us considerably towards commencing our investigations into the superstitions of the Shawia.

One afternoon, during a prolonged period of drought, we heard the shrill piping voices of young children singing in the streets, and, eager to ascertain what this might mean, we hastened into the village to find a number of very young girls parading the streets carrying with them a very large wooden ladle, such as is used in every Shawia home, carefully dressed up with silk kerchiefs and silver brooches, earrings, and pendants to resemble a woman's head. At every door the little party paused, singing some such words as: "The ladle is playing in the street; Oh, clouds that are on high, allow the rain to fall," and asking alms of the inmates, who, in response, presented them with dried fruits, semolina, and other foodstuffs according to their means. After the whole

village has been paraded the children take the food to a mosque or, in some villages, to a sacred tree and there cook and consume it, hoping that the ceremony they have gone through will cause the much desired blessing of a shower of rain to refresh their parent's sun-baked crops.

A knowledge of this ancient superstitious rite, combined with the acquaintanceship of numerous women, made while watching them at their potting and other crafts, enabled us to push forward to some extent in our inquiries into the practice of magic in the mountains, for the women are better equipped with magical lore than are the men of the Shawía—do we not speak of “old wives’ fables” in this country even now?—and when once the traveller possesses a knowledge of even a very few magical observances he will find it far easier to increase that knowledge than it had been to commence to acquire it; for the confidence of the natives in such matters is notoriously hard to obtain in the beginning of investigations, owing to their dread of exposing themselves to the ridicule of a thoughtless listener.

The Shawía, as well as his Arab neighbour of the low country, is extraordinarily credulous in his faith in the old magical observances of his people, observances, such as that which we will now describe, which the merest child should realize are part and parcel of a system of obtaining money under false pretences which flourishes like a green bay tree in every community in which superstition is still rife.

In Algeria divorce is obtainable, with or without just cause, in the simplest manner possible; a word before the Kadi or representative of Mohammedan law, a small payment to the wife if she be innocent of any grounds for a divorce, and the wretched woman returns to her

parents, or joins the numerous ranks of professional women whose existence is a blot upon the Shawia character. The women, therefore, are very ready to avail themselves of any means, magical or otherwise, which may enable them to retain the affections of their husbands when once they show signs of waning; a class of person, therefore, has been called into being to provide these means—for a fee.

An old woman of this class who possesses the requisite knowledge of magic, or whose eloquence can persuade her dupes that she possesses it, known as a "Sorceress of the Moon," proceeds at dead of night to a cemetery and there digs up the bones of an old corpse, which she burns upon a fire with some incense and magical herbs, at the same time invoking the aid of the Almighty in her impious task, for the desecration of a grave is regarded with the utmost horror by all right-minded Mohammedans.

She then stains one of her eyelids only with antimony, one lip with walnut bark, and one hand and one foot with henna. This done the seeker after the philtre, upon whose nerves the eerie environment of a cemetery by night has by this time begun to tell considerably, will be horrified to notice that the moon has left the heavens and commenced to descend towards a dish of water placed ready to receive it, the sorceress meantime rolling in frenzy upon the ground and calling upon the moon to hasten in its descent, the ground around trembling the while in the convulsions of an earthquake. The moon eventually enters the water in the dish, "growling like a camel whose load is being placed upon its back," to use the words of one of my informants, and producing in the water a sort of foam which remains after, in response to vigorous invocations on the part of the sorceress the moon has returned to its proper place in the firma-

ment and the earthquake has ceased to disturb the calm of the night.

This foam is carefully skimmed from the water by the sorceress, and subsequently dried, when she retails small quantities of it at very high prices to a wife who desires to mix it secretly with her husband's food in order to retain his affections.

This love philtre is merely one example of quite a series of similar observances, many of them of a highly disgusting nature, which are practised to this day in the Aurès and the desert, although so reprehensible are they considered by the more reputable of the natives that a sorceress who indulges in them would almost certainly be killed should she be caught in the nefarious act. The poor women who allow themselves to be duped in this way, and who firmly believe that the moon does descend into the bowl, probably only do so because the environment of the cemetery and the mystic antics of the sorceress have combined to frighten them literally out of their wits, so that they are quite prepared to see the moon perform any weird evolution which the old hag may tell them it is performing without any regard to the possibility or otherwise of evolution itself.

During our first stay at Beni Ferah we were lodged in the house of the Kaïd, but upon a later visit to this Berber village we stayed in the school which has been established for some years at Beni Ferah, and which is the residence of the only European in the place, the schoolmaster. This gentleman, whose solitary existence in the midst of Shawia culture must be trying in the extreme, welcomed us most kindly, and, indeed, I fancy he is genuinely delighted to receive a European traveller, whose presence gives him an opportunity of exchanging ideas with a member of civilized society which does not

often come his way, save during his short periods of leave at Constantine or some other large town.

While staying as the guest of the schoolmaster we sought to excuse ourselves from the many invitations to meals which the Shawia, by no means less liberal in their hospitality than the Arabs of the plains, were continually pressing upon us, for these meals are somewhat trying functions, but our native friends would take no refusal. If we could scarcely leave our European host to dine with them in their houses, then the meal should be sent down to us—but we would kindly remember to return the dishes in which it was sent! Thus we were entertained, royally enough according to Berber ideas, whether we wished it or not, and upon some occasions we were obliged to accept offers of hospitality in the village itself.

Invitations such as these are apt to test the endurance of the European to a considerable extent, for not only must the guest attack each and every dish placed before him, but he must do so with a heartiness quite foreign to the dinner tables of civilized society. As every traveller in the Aurès, if he stays long enough to make acquaintances among the natives, may expect to partake of many meals with the Shawia, we may perhaps describe the dishes usually placed before a guest by a middle-class family in the hills.

The first course consists of a broth of mutton, goat, or chicken, so strongly flavoured with red pepper as to be practically uneatable by any one who is not accustomed to dishes of the very hottest kind; flat loaves of unleavened bread accompany the soup. This will often be followed by a stew of meat and dried apricots or plums (a dish which, when well prepared, is quite palatable), or, in the case of more modest repasts con-

sisting of two courses only, by the national dish of Algeria, meat and "kuskus."

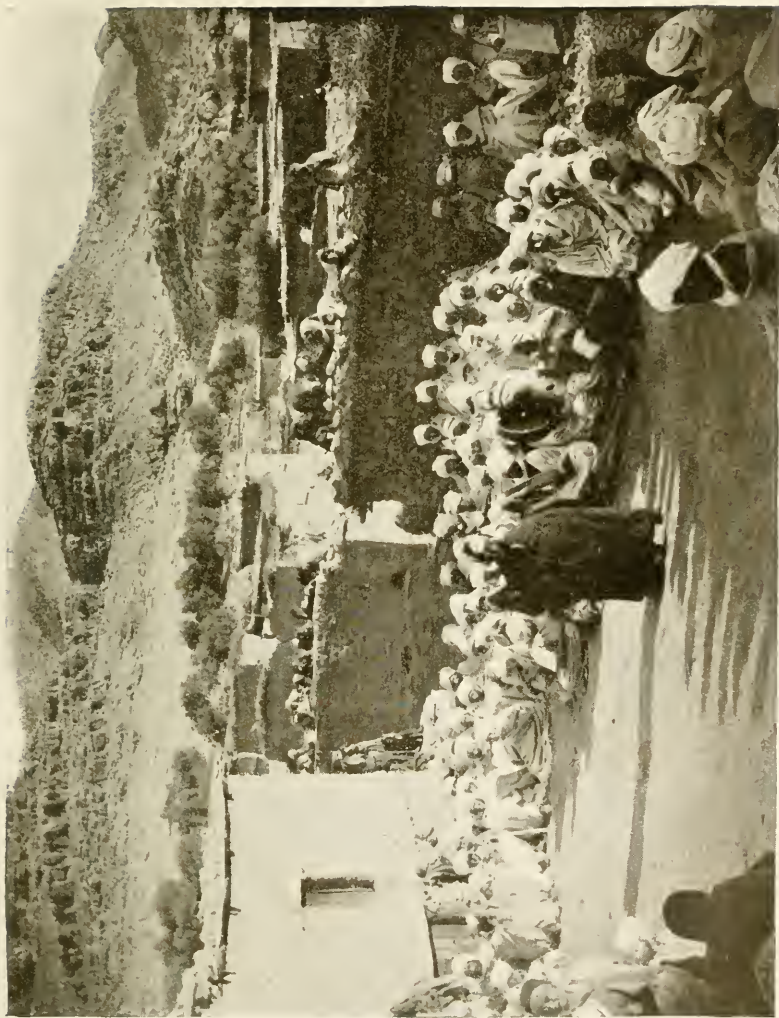
The "kuskus," which is simply semolina steamed in a home-made pottery "double cooker" in vapours arising from the meat stewing in a bowl beneath it, is served up in a large bowl, fragments of meat garnishing its surface, which is placed on the ground before the guests, each of whom is provided with a wooden spoon, and sometimes, in deference to western ideas, with a plate as well.

While "kuskus" can be perfectly wholesome, and even palatable if cooked simply, it is very frequently rendered almost uneatable by the addition of quantities of butter that has been stored until rancid in a goatskin, in which condition it is beloved of the natives. The traveller, therefore, soon learns many an artifice by means of which he can convey to his host the impression that he is consuming more of the dish than is actually the case, for the fullest justice must be done to the meal, and every possible sign of repletion should be exhibited after it. Dessert, consisting of figs, or of honey and walnuts (to be eaten together), with cups of black coffee terminate the repast.

The meal which I have described above is of the kind which we were offered daily during our wanderings in the hills, but, as we shall find later on, far more elaborate banquets are provided by the richer chieftains of the Aurès and the desert.

But meals were not the only functions to which we were invited at Beni Ferah, for we enjoyed there, during a later visit, several opportunities of attending wedding ceremonies in the capacity of invited guests, opportunities which revealed fewer differences than we had anticipated between the weddings of the Arabs of El Kantara and those of their Shawia neighbours in the hills. Let us





DANCING AT A WEDDING, BENI FERAH.

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choose for description a wedding scene at Beni Ferah as typical of similar ceremonies all over the massif.

One gloriously sunny afternoon we proceeded, in response to a pressing invitation, to an open space amid the houses on the hillside, where we found assembled a very numerous company of men, women, and children, several hundreds at least squatting upon the ground, or perched upon any such point of vantage as a ruined wall or the flat roofs of the surrounding houses, listening to the weird strains of a couple of tom-toms and an oboe played with extraordinary vigour by three musicians hired for the purpose, stringed instruments being unknown in the hills, before whom a professional danseuse from the valley of the Wed Abdi moved slowly backwards and forwards, moving her feet, hands, and abdominal muscles in the singularly ungraceful movements of a native dance.

Many of the people present had merely turned up to look on, but those who were guests at the ceremony had donned clean garments for the occasion, the women folk being especially resplendent in clean cotton dress material and glittering with every ounce of locally made silver jewellery which they could obtain, their bright silken head scarves adding a fine note of colour to the scene, which, from its very setting upon the sunlit hillside with a panorama of steep juniper-studded slopes and towering rocky peaks behind it, was brilliant enough in its simple splendour.

Accommodated with halfa-grass mats upon which to sit, we took our places among the crowd, and listening to the strains of the "music," the weird tremulous cries of the women, and the occasional firing of blank charges from muzzle-loading guns, infrequent owing to a difficulty in obtaining the powder which the native so dearly loves

to hear "speak" upon festal occasions of all kinds, we awaited the time when the bride should be brought from her home, a few hundred yards distant, to the house of the bridegroom, before which we were sitting. Some considerable time elapsed before any movement was made to bring her, the crowd meantime being engrossed in the antics of the professional dancer, whose swaying form now seemed to endeavour to symbolize the bashfulness of the bride-to-be, and now the voluptuous passion of the young wife.

At every pause in her dance, and often even as she moved, male members of the assembled crowd came forward and thrust their offerings, in the form of French notes, under her turban upon her brow—she must have been carrying as much as a hundred francs in this manner upon several occasions, although she frequently removed the money and concealed it in her garments as she danced—while the musicians, too, came in for very generous treatment from their audience. The crowd during this part of the ceremony was quiet enough, the only incident which occurred being a fight between two small girls, one of whom was carrying upon her back a child, probably her brother, who gravely maintained his jockey-like seat until the conflict had been brought to a close, amid the tears and, it must be confessed, oaths of the combatants by the interference of their relatives.

The bridegroom had meantime attracted much the same amount of attention as does the bridegroom at an English wedding, but, conscious of his own lack of importance, perhaps, he was not even present for more than a very few minutes at the dance! A wedding among the Shawia is a ceremony for the bride, and the bridegroom is expected to figure in it scarcely at all;

indeed, if, while wedding music resounds in a village of the Aurès, the traveller should encounter a group of young men all dressed in their best, wandering from café to café, and appearing to be ignorant of the fact that anything unusual is going forward, he may safely assume that this is the bridegroom and his particular friends, whom custom compels to hold aloof from the ceremony. At length, after two or three female members of the bridegroom's family had joined in the dancing and had been greeted with cries of encouragement from the women, but with no pecuniary offerings from the men, they being respectable members of the community, a move was made to fetch the bride. The musicians led the procession, followed by a mule, across whose saddle was spread a bright red rug, and behind the mule came a number of gaily-dressed women, singing as they went.

We moved with the crowd in the wake of this little procession. Upon arrival at the cottage of the bride, for she came of humble parentage, the musicians, the mule, and the crowd came to a halt, only the female attendants who had been singing and the professional dancer entering the house, my wife accompanying them at the request of the bride's relations.

In the semi-darkness of the little house she found a crowd of women and children, who filled the place to overflowing; some of the women singing, some dancing, others emitting the strange quivering cry which is their note of rejoicing at festivals. In the midst of this turmoil the bride, a child of about twelve years old, was being bedecked with new garments, the gift of the bridegroom, for her journey to her new home.

The poor child was far too overcome by the attentions she was receiving to take much notice of the gift

of a necklet of coral, so dear to the hearts of Shawia beauties, which my wife had brought for her, but it was duly placed around her neck, to the envy of her friends, and at last she was carried out, a blaze of gaily coloured silks and muslins, her face hidden by a veil, and placed upon the mule, a boy of about three or four years old being made to ride upon the saddle in front of her, a symbol of the hoped-for sons to come.

The short procession to the bridegroom's house was accompanied by the firing of guns, much singing, and loud cries. Upon arrival at her future husband's door the bride was lifted from the mule and carried in, breaking upon the lintel as she went an egg, that emblem of a fertility which alone can ensure her a protracted residence in her new home.

Once inside, the bride is received by female members of her husband's family with much noise and dancing, but the bridegroom himself only returns home late in the evening, entering his house as unobtrusively as if merely coming in from some everyday excursion or task.

What, may we ask ourselves, are the thoughts of the bride as she enters thus upon her married life?

Surely, if the poor child is not too overwhelmed by the noise around her to think of the future at all, they must be some such thoughts as these: "How long before, unwanted though unoffending, I shall pass out in ignominy from the house in which I am acclaimed to-day?"

### CHAPTER III

## FROM AFRICA TO EUROPE

FROM BENI FERAH TO THE LAND OF THE NOMADS—THE LEGEND OF THE OULED ZIANE—A TALE OF BORDER WAR—AN ARAB CHIEF OF THE TRADITIONAL TYPE—DIRT OF THE NOMADS—CARPET MAKING—THE REST-HOUSE AT DJEMORA—FROM AFRICA TO EUROPE IN ONE DAY'S MARCH—"THE CAPITAL OF THE AURÈS"—LEGEND OF THE FOUNDATION OF MENAA—A MODEL VILLAGE—AN ANCIENT FORM OF MILL—THE SHOEMAKERS OF MENAA—VALUE OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE WOMEN—A SAINTLY LUNATIC.

**A**T the conclusion of our first visit to Beni Ferah we moved on over the hills to the oasis of Djemora, which lies at the foot of the Aurès massif, some six miles in a direct line to the south, our object being to compare some of the customs we had noted among the Shawia with similar ones obtaining among the nomad Arab inhabitants of the plains around Djemora.

The journey over the hills, along a track difficult enough for loaded mules in 1913 but now considerably improved, afforded us many fine views of mountain and desert, of which perhaps the most remarkable was the panorama of the large oasis of Djemora, with its thousands of palms on either side of a broad river-bed, down which flows such of the waters of the Wed Abdi as are not absorbed by "seggia" irrigation higher up its valley; the valley itself, bounded on either hand by rugged barren hills, being exceptionally beautiful, for as the fiery desert sun sinks in the west its parting rays illumine the hills till they glow in brilliant shades of pink and red, fading

in a few minutes to purple as the mists of evening fall upon the land.

The oasis of Djemora is the headquarters of the Ouled Ziane nomad Arabs, who wander with their flocks of sheep and goats over the desert to the south-west of the Aurès in the winter, and on the plateau to the north of the massif in the great heat of the summer, when the plains cannot provide even the scanty pasture required by these hardy animals; that is to say, these nomads own the gardens at Djemora, from which they obtain their yearly supply of dates, but, camping out with their flocks, they are seldom to be seen in any numbers in the hamlets of the oasis, save in the autumn, when they come in to pick the date harvest.

Concerning the early history of the tribe we heard a quaint legend. Somewhere in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, when the Ouled Ziane inhabited a part of Morocco, a small party of men were sent out to bring in a bride from a neighbouring tribe. On their way home with her they encountered a demon, or, as it is called in Arabic, a "jinn," whose particular form of malevolence consisted in eloping with brides, and who promptly flew away with the lady. Her escort, ashamed to return home without their charge, turned their steps eastward, and, after much wandering about in an effort to earn a living as professional herdsmen, they finally married and settled in eastern Algeria and founded that portion of the Ouled Ziane tribe which, in course of time, became masters of the country round Djemora, after much fighting with the Shawia Berbers of the Wed Abdi, who, not without reason, resented the arrival of strange nomad neighbours whose presence would probably be a constant menace to the security of their own homes and crops. This legend we learned from the old Kaïd of Djemora,





IN THE OASIS OF DJEMORA.

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Basha Bashir, our host in the oasis, who, as he became better acquainted with us during successive visits, delighted to spend his evenings in regaling us with stories of the past.

Many of these referred to members of his own family, for he came of ancient stock, and to their doings in the brave days of old, when raid and counter-raid between Arab and Shawia were unchecked by any foreign authority.

Upon one occasion, in years gone by, both the nomads and the Berbers became tired of their never-ending feuds and decided to settle a boundary dispute by means of a shooting-match instead of by force of arms in actual conflict.

Eight champions were selected by either side, a mark was set up upon a stone, and the marksmen loaded their long-barrelled flint-lock muskets, which are to be found to-day with their woodwork elaborately inlaid with silver in every out-of-the-way village of the desert and the hills. The Shawia team fired first; not a man hit the mark. The Arabs followed, resting their muskets upon boulders and using every aid to steady shooting that they could think of. Their first seven marksmen failed as miserably as their opponents. Then came the turn of their last champion, the grandfather of old Basha Bashir. Scorning anything in the nature of a rifle-rest, he called for his favourite mare, and climbing into the saddle with the usual muttered "Bismillah," without which invocation of the Deity no pious Arab mounts his horse, he retired to a considerable distance behind the firing-point and spurred his mare towards the target as hard as her flying hoofs could carry her. Before reaching the firing-point he rose in his stirrups and, without checking his mount in her mad career, fired over

her head. Fair and square he hit the mark, and the decision in the boundary dispute went to the Ouled Ziane!

It is perfectly true that certain Arabs of the plains do display remarkable skill in shooting from the saddle when going at speed—I have seen it among the Haouamed near Bou Saada, and described it in a previous work—and it is also true that as marksmen in the ordinary sense of the word they perform extremely badly. It is possible, therefore, that a substratum of truth underlies the tale of the exploit of Basha's grandfather, an exploit which has doubtless lost none of its glamour in the lapse of time.

Whenever we visited Djemora before the war we stayed as the guests of the old Kaïd, in the four-roomed house of mud-brick which he had erected opposite to his own residence for the use of passing officials, our meals being sent in to us by his wives. Basha Bashir himself is a typical Arab gentleman of the old school, a school which does not speak French, nor visit the Casino at Biskra, nor indulge in any of the pleasures of civilization which are daily finding more and more favour among the younger generation of wealthy chiefs.

Seventy years of age, he sits his horse like a boy of twenty, a fact that is doubtless attributable to the simple, almost Spartan, life he leads, seldom leaving his oasis, and never indulging in the late hours and gaiety of Biskra. As hospitable as the traditional Arab is supposed to be, he is deservedly popular with those few Europeans who have made his acquaintance, while the fact that he comes of ancient lineage, and that he possesses sound judgment combined with force of character, have long since gained him, to a very remarkable extent, the respect and affection of his tribe.

Living comfortably enough in the Kaïd's house, the interior of which is grotesquely ornamented with life-size wall paintings of French and native officers covered with decorations, and with some very realistic, if crude, hunting scenes, the work of an Arab from a town, we spent our time exploring the oasis of Djemora.

Like so many oases of the desert, its little mud-brick huts are built in scattered clusters rather than in one large village, a fact that rather adds to the beauty of the place, which, as I have pointed out, is as remarkable as that of any oasis to be found on the edge of the desert, and is enhanced by the glimpse of snow-capped hills visible far up the Abdi valley. But the curse of Djemora is its dirt.

Despite the existence of a plentiful warm spring in the oasis (which is used to a considerable extent for washing garments), the natives of Djemora appear never to bathe their persons. We had ample opportunity of observing this fact, for, in our endeavour to ingratiate ourselves with the people, and also to lead up to an inquiry into native medicine and surgery which will be described in due course, we always placed the contents of our travelling medicine-chest at the disposal of the sick and injured, patients often coming from miles round to make use of it. In an enormous number of cases the malady seemed to have been caused, or at least much aggravated, by dirt. Upon one occasion, when my wife suggested that a child suffering from a skin disease should be washed before we attempted to treat it, its mother exclaimed: "What! With water?" roared with laughter and departed, taking the filthy infant with her, never to expose it to the risk of a washing by bringing it to us again!

There seems to be a certain reason for the personal

dirtiness of the Ouled Ziane. As we have seen, although a few members of the tribe inhabit the comparatively well-watered oasis of Djemora, the people are really nomads, who for generations have wandered in wastes where water in sufficient quantities for drinking and cooking is so hard to obtain that none can be spared for washing, so that the Ouled Ziane have never acquired the habits of personal cleanliness which to most peoples, even the savagest, are as a second nature.

We found a considerable similarity between the customs and beliefs of the Ouled Ziane and those of the Shawia of Beni Ferah and other villages of the Aurès, doubtless owing to the fact that the nomads frequently choose their wives among the pretty daughters of their fair-haired neighbours; but a comparison of them would be out of place in any but strictly technical work, and the few arts and crafts observed at Djemora were identical with those noted in the Shawia settlements of the hills.

One art, however, we found to be specially well developed by one individual at Djemora, and that was the manufacture of carpets. The individual in question, with the assistance of his wife, has earned quite an extensive reputation throughout a large portion of the Aurès massif as a maker of those woollen rugs upon which wealthy natives delight to offer an honoured guest a seat, and which are so much sought after, and often dearly bought, by tourists in the towns.

The wealthy native does not visit the carpet-maker's house and choose his rug from a pile placed ready for his inspection, for the maker holds no stock of his wares. Instead, the rich man invites the maker and his wife to his house or tent, provides them with accommodation, states how much wool he himself has available for weaving the rug, and inquires what dyes he must provide. These

dyes were formerly all of native preparation (madder, which grows locally, was used for red), but now, unfortunately, cheap imported dyes are very rapidly taking the place of the home-prepared article, with consequent deterioration in the quality of the rugs produced.

The necessary wool and dyes having been provided by the prospective owner of the rug, a price is arranged for the labour (and a high one it sometimes is), and the carpet-maker insists upon his patron killing a lamb or a kid in order to celebrate with a feast the commencement of the work. The carpet is actually woven by the wife upon the very simple vertical handloom to be found in every tent or Berber home for the manufacture of burnouses. The woman sits upon the side of the rug which, when finished, will be upon the ground, while her husband, squatting upon the other side, the "right side up," of the loom, directs with a stick the insertion of the little strands of coloured wool which form the pile, carefully controlling the number of strands of each colour used in order to preserve the accuracy of the design he is thus causing to be worked in. Enjoying the hospitality of their patron, the carpet-makers not unnaturally spend some time upon their task, and, when it is completed, they usually demand a further celebration in the form of a roasted lamb.

Thus it will be seen that well-made rugs are not obtained too cheaply even by the natives themselves, but it is none the less true that no native pays anything like such prices as I have heard asked for old and dirty mats by persons who live, and live very handsomely, upon those people who will not try to ascertain the current prices of things in a country which they are visiting for the first time.

During our last visit to Djemora, though we frequently

enjoyed the hospitality of old Basha Bashir, we stayed at a "rest-house," or bordj, which the French authorities have recently erected there, as well as at various points upon projected roads through the Aurès, and which offer a greater degree of comfort to the traveller than he can expect in the home of any but the very wealthiest chiefs. These bordjs, where they exist, are I believe all built upon the same plan, though my travels in the central valleys of the Aurès in 1914 were accomplished before their completion there. That at Djemora, and also at Menaa, consists of a courtyard, containing a shelter for the wanderer's beasts, from which courtyard lead off some half-dozen bedrooms, all furnished with European beds, sheets, and blankets, washstands, mirrors, and chairs, and a dining-room and sitting-room, both supplied with the necessary tables and comfortable chairs, as well as a kitchen containing French cooking utensils, tableware and glass, and a room for the Arab caretaker of the bordj.

The caretakers are men chosen for their reliability and for a knowledge of simple European cooking, so that the traveller upon arriving at one of these rest-houses can rely upon obtaining accommodation more comfortable than he could find in a most elaborate camp, and also meals as eatable as those to be had in many an up-country inn.

Indeed, I have the greatest reason for gratitude to the French for having constructed the bordj at Djemora, for, on the occasion of our last visit to the village, my wife contracted a severe attack of Spanish influenza, which might easily have ended fatally in any of the bare stone huts we are compelled to occupy for want of better accommodation in the remote Shawia hamlets of the Aurès.



Influenza has wrought terrible havoc at Djemora, for its poor ill-nourished inhabitants seem to be able to offer little resistance to the scourge, so that the cemetery, which lies between the Kaïd's house and the largest hamlet in the oasis, very greatly increased in size when the complaint made its great attack upon the Ouled Ziane.

When we left Djemora in 1913 to resume our investigations among the Shawía, we moved on up the valley of its stream to Menaa, some miles to the north-east, thus following the line which the projected road from the Biskra-El Kantara highway to the upper part of the valley of the Wad Abdi will presumably take when completed, and which, I venture to predict, will become a first favourite among excursions for those whose travels are confined to the metalled road and the luxury of a car.

The valley between the barren hills, which is wide enough where it shelters the oasis of Djemora, narrows to something resembling a gorge at the picturesque little village of Beni Suig, some half-an hour's ride higher up, where the sheer red cliffs and the deep green of the date gardens form a wonderful picture in the brilliant sunlight. High up on the face of these cliffs, long since rendered inaccessible to man by the crumbling of the rocks, are to be seen the walled-up entrances to caves, which were used as dwellings long ago in the days of border warfare, indeed, cave dwellings, as we shall find in other parts of the massif, are by no means rare even to-day in the fastnesses of the Aurès, and constitute one of those survivals from ancient times which have seemed to me so interesting in my wanderings in the hills, and of which the life of the Shawía affords so many striking examples.

Above Beni Suig, indeed before Beni Suig is reached,

the traveller is often compelled to ride in the bed of the stream, among the loose boulders of which his mule will pick his way with remarkable cleverness, carefully feeling for a hold before putting its weight upon a foot, the water rushing around its knees the while.

The only danger the traveller by mule is at all likely to run, always provided he can keep his head and sit quietly upon his animal while it conveys him along some very dizzy overhanging paths, is to be found while riding in the beds of streams, which are sometimes liable to increase, in an incredibly short space of time, from the shallowest of brooks, scarcely damping the mule's fetlocks, to the proportion of foaming torrents, sweeping before them man and beast who are unlucky enough to be caught by them in their wild rush after much rain has fallen in the higher country; but the local natives who accompany the traveller can be trusted to see to it that serious risks of this kind are avoided. As the traveller approaches Menaâ, having passed a beautiful little oasis of date palms at Amentane on the way, he will enter a basin formed by the junction of the Wad Abdi, flowing from the north-east, and the Bouzina River, quite a considerable stream, which, rising near the village from which it takes its name at the foot of the great grey rocky walls of the Mahmel mountain, enters the Abdi valley through a narrow gorge from the north.

After passing a cemetery in which the tombs of holy men are surmounted by columns of whitewashed mud, bearing a striking resemblance to burnoused human forms of exceptional stature when dimly seen in the twilight, and which might reasonably fill with awe a lonely superstitious stranger arriving late in the evening, the traveller will find that, in the few short miles of marching which have brought him from Djemora, he appears to have

left North Africa behind him and reached some mountain country of Southern Europe.

At Djemora he had been staying in a Saharan oasis of date palms, beneath red hills as barren as the desert below them ; at Menaa he finds himself in a fertile valley studded with peach, apricot, walnut, pear, fig, and numerous other fruit trees, into which scattered palms, to be numbered in tens rather than in tens of thousands, appear to have wandered by mistake. The neat fields of corn and beans and vegetables which he will see around him, too, will at once show him that he has left behind him the land of Arab neglect of the soil, and has returned to the home of the fair-haired Shawia husbandmen he had first met at Beni Ferah, while the hills which dominate the valley, far from being barren like those he has left at Djemora, are so thickly studded with small juniper and ilex trees as to present on some of their slopes the appearance of a mountain forest. Menaa can easily be reached by a bridle path, ending in a long and very steep descent, from Beni Ferah, but as we have seen, the latter village, despite its few hundreds of date palms, much more closely resembles a settlement of the higher Aurès than a desert oasis, so that the traveller who approaches Menaa from it, though he will ride through some extremely picturesque valleys, will miss the apparent sudden change from Africa to Europe which will strike him at the end of his journey from Djemora.

The village of Menaa itself, now the terminus of a road from Lambèse and Batna in the north which gives access to wheeled traffic to the heart of the western Aurès, stands upon a rocky mound at the south-western end of the basin formed by the confluence of the Abdi and Bouzina streams.

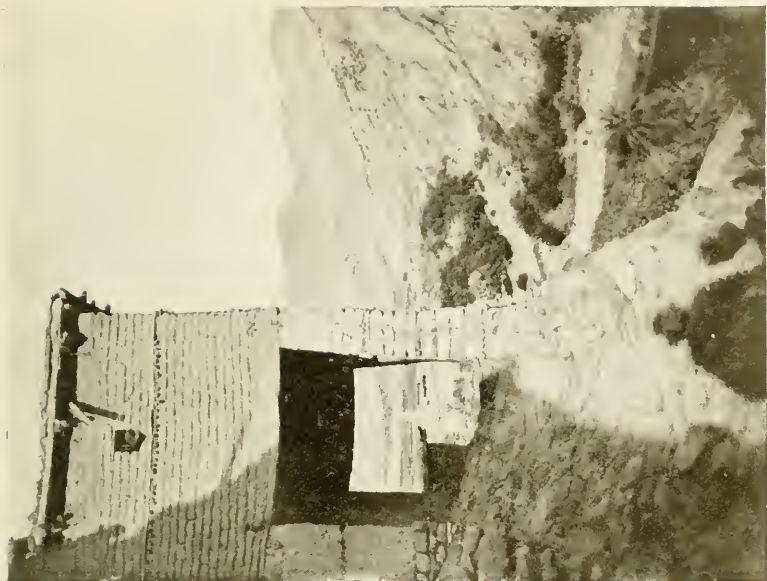
Upon the occasion of our first visit to "the Capital of

the Aurès," as the place is proudly named by its inhabitants, we stayed as guests with the Kaïd, a young and most capable chief who speaks perfect French and to whose energy Menaa largely owes the prosperity and the progress which we were able to note when we revisited the village seven years later.

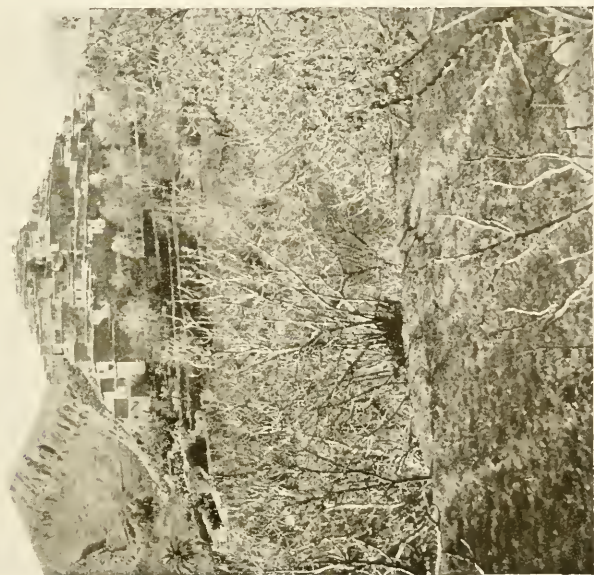
The Kaïd, who lodged us in a couple of furnished rooms and treated us royally during our stay, took a keen interest in our work, and furnished us with many details of the history and customs of his people.

Some centuries ago the people now inhabiting Menaa had been driven from their former village higher up in the hills, and were searching for a suitable site upon which to erect a new settlement. While undecided which site to choose they met, near the confluence of the two streams alluded to above, a holy man riding up from Djemora upon an ass, and they decided to seek his advice. Dismounting the stranger said: "Follow my she-ass, and where she rolls there build your village."

The ass roamed around the valley and, ascending the rocky mound upon which the village now stands, she lay down and rolled. "Here build your village," said the saint, "and call it your Menaa (saviour), for its situation will save you from attacks to come." Thus Menaa was founded, and to this day, in token of their gratitude to the holy man who chose for them so good a site, the people of Menaa pay a nominal tribute of garden produce every year to his descendants, who dwell in the plains near Barika to the west. The chief was careful to show us all the advantages of Menaa. Owing to its plentiful supply of running water the crops produced in the limited area of the basin are abundant and of excellent quality, but the busy Shawia farmers do not neglect to make use of any patch of soil which can be tilled upon the



THE ABDI VALLEY FROM MENAA.



MENAA, "THE CAPITAL OF THE ATRÈS."



mountains themselves, so that neat rows of small fields can be seen high up among the hills, far beyond the reach of any possible "seggia" irrigation, which rely for their water supply upon the showers attracted by the bush-studded ridges, many of which showers do not reach the valley below.

The houses of the village, huddled together upon the rocky mound surmounted by the minaret of a mosque, though mostly built of stone after the manner of all true Berber dwellings in the Aurès, are in many cases too well built, or, in the case of the north face of the village, too neatly aligned to be worthy of close examination by any one desirous of seeing a really typical Shawia settlement; indeed, Menaa may more reasonably be studied as an example of what such a settlement can become, if its people would only develop it upon its own lines, than as a specimen of a Berber village of the Aurès.

Thus the northern face of the village, overlooking the depression which now contains the terminus of the road, is so neatly constructed as to suggest some European influence in its erection, and to give a tinge of reason (very slight it must be confessed) to the boastful title of "The little Constantine" which some Shawia admirers of Menaa have bestowed upon the place, comparing it to the capital city of the eastern department of Algeria.

The northern face of the village contains the somewhat elaborate two-storeyed house of the Kaïd, a mosque, a bath-house (the property of the chief), a couple of cafés, and some shops of the "universal provider" description, such as are not to be found in remoter hamlets.

His lands, his shops, and his bath-house are not the only sources from which our host, the Kaïd of Menaa,

derives his income, for he is the owner of one of those corn-mills which constitute a striking example of the survival of primitive machinery in most parts of the Aurès, as well as at El Kantara, and other oases which can boast of the possession of a stream.

The upper of two horizontal grindstones, chipped by hand by the natives of Beni Ferah, is caused to rotate upon the fixed lower stone by means of a horizontal water-wheel below it, with which it is connected by a vertical shaft, the water being directed from a "seggia" to the wheel, or turbine, by means of a movable trough when the mill is required to act.

A piece of wood resting upon the revolving stone is connected with a movable spout from the cone-shaped box in which the corn is placed so that the rotary movement of the stone causes the spout to oscillate and the grain to fall little by little between the stones. This simple turbine mill, the design of which must be of very great antiquity, is capable of producing some really excellent flour, and seems likely to persist for many generations to come among so conservative a people as the Shawia.

Menaâ, besides being one of the most important agricultural centres of the poor valleys of the Aurès massif, is also important as a centre of commerce for, in addition to possessing a fair number of native shops, it manufactures most, if not all, of the leather goods of the Abdi and Bouzina valleys; natives from these regions being compelled to purchase their shoes from the only cobblers available, those of the industrious "Capital of the Aurès." These slippers, made of goatskin, dyed yellow for male customers and red with yellow toe-caps for the ladies, are well and strongly sewn, and will be found useful to Europeans as camp and bedroom shoes



when once their rather rounded soles have been trodden flat by actual wear (I am wearing a similar pair bought at Bou Saada fifteen years ago as I write), but they afford an example as glaring as that of the Beni Ferah pottery of the artificial prices now ruling even in out-of-the-way districts of the hills; in 1914 they cost three francs in silver per pair; in 1920 the Shawía were paying a twenty-franc note for them!

This increase in price, however, affects the more wealthy natives only, for the vast majority of Shawía are content to clamber up and down their precipitous hillsides shod with nothing more elaborate than sandals of plaited halfa grass, which cost them nothing, for the material grows upon the hills and even young children are capable of making their footgear for themselves.

Upon the occasion of our last visit to Menaá we found that not only had the road which we had seen in course of construction higher up the Abdi valley been continued to the village, but also that a bordj, exactly similar to that of Djemora, had been erected two or three hundred yards to the north of the rocky mound on which the village stands. We therefore stayed at the bordj, and found its guardian, Belkasssem, to be an excellent cook as well as a very intelligent person, able and very willing to help us forward in our work.

This bordj should prove extremely useful to the motorist who would see the Shawía in their own land by following the road from Lambèse down the Abdi valley and spending a few days at Menaá, choosing as the time for his visit the spring of the year, when all the fruit trees are abloom and the snow has left the higher passes over which the road must run, and bringing with him a few simple stores from a civilized town, to give Belkasssem a chance to show what he can really do with

a few European dainties to add to the local produce which he contrived to make palatable enough for us.

When we reached the bordj which very rarely receives even an official visitor, we found that its courtyard was largely used as a place of gossip by women and girls from the scattered houses round, cronies of Yamina, Belkassem's wife, who would bring their distaffs and spindles, or bundles of wool for skeining, and, squatting on the sunny side of the yard, indulge to their heart's delight in picking to pieces other people's husbands, whispering over the latest village scandal, or discussing clothes with as much interest and animation as their more civilized sisters are sometimes suspected of doing at tea-parties in an English village. Upon our arrival these daily reunions came to an end, but after a day or two the Shawia women, who, as we have seen, are far freer than their Arab neighbours, finding that my wife was anxious to make friends with them and that I was harmless, began to resume their habit of visiting the bordj, so that in a very short time we came to be upon excellent terms with them, and my wife was enabled to prosecute her inquiries into many of their simple arts and crafts, while as their confidence in me increased I managed to secure quite a collection of drawings of tattoo marks and notes upon superstitions, etc., to add to the information I was gleaning upon Shawia life in the Aurès.

It is very certain that, comparatively free as the Shawia women are, the European bachelor can hope to learn little or nothing of them and of their lives, but in the presence of an Englishwoman their curiosity to examine her and her garments will lead them to converse freely with the male traveller, when once he has to some extent gained their confidence.

Very many primitive customs, such as must be studied by any one engaged in examining the daily life of a native race, are known only to the women, indeed I think that the general success or failure of our work in any Algerian village may be said to correspond to the degree in which we were able to associate with its female population, and that I have been able to see anything of their lives, study their weaving and spinning, glean details of their superstitions and sorcery, and be welcomed as a guest in their homes is due solely to the presence of my wife.

We spent a good deal of our time, therefore, during our last visit to Menaâ in our home at the bordj, receiving relays of visitors of both sexes and gradually adding to our notes, but we wandered a good deal about the village and, this time, made the acquaintance of a powerful marabout who occupies a fairly extensive "zawia" a few hundred yards to the north-east of the village itself. A "zawia" may be described as the home of a saintly or maraboutic family and its retainers, in which facilities are offered, in the way of books and accommodation, for the study of Mohammedan doctrines, and in which followers of the marabout, who is at the head of the establishment, or indeed any passing Moslems, are housed and entertained should they pause for a night or two upon a journey. Although certain maraboutic families are wealthy enough to maintain such establishments without appealing to their followers for gifts, the majority of the saints do receive substantial sums or gifts in kind from those who reverence them, and thus they are able to offer the hospitality to all and sundry which I have mentioned. I do not know of a word in the English language which is exactly the equivalent of the Arabic "zawia"; it is neither a feudal

castle, a small university, nor a monastery, and yet it embodies some of the characteristics of all three. In these pages, therefore, when describing other zawias which we visited in the Aurès, I shall employ the Arabic word without attempting a translation. We became rather friendly with the saint of Menaâ; I think the soreness of a holy toe and a tube of carbolated vaseline combined to cement the friendship, and in so doing we made the acquaintance of one of his relations, a middle-aged man, who, though at times perfectly rational and, I believe, of a very genial disposition, also experienced periods of imbecility, one of which he was undergoing at the time we met him.

His imbecility fortunately never led him to any acts of violence, indeed it seemed rather to increase his natural geniality, and it made the poor fellow an unmitigated nuisance to us, for he was so anxious to ensure that we had everything we could want that he insisted upon pursuing us whenever he found an opportunity, and he was rather encouraged in his attentions by our superstitious old orderly, who firmly believed that the companionship of this poor mad scion of a saintly house would lead to his receiving a little of the blessing which the lunatic was supposed to give off in his touch and conversation, if the unfortunate fellow's gibberish can be so termed. All feeble-minded persons are regarded as uncanny, if not exactly holy, in Algeria; a mad hereditary saint, therefore, is looked upon as very much to be respected indeed.

Although I made as many inquiries as I could into the arts and crafts of the inhabitants of Menaâ, I found that I obtained my most valuable notes on these subjects in more remote hamlets in which imported implements were less likely to be found, the arts,

therefore, being more strictly native in character ; but at Menaá I found the manufacture of silver ornaments to be carried on more extensively perhaps than in any other Shawía village, and, as these ornaments are somewhat striking in character, are made by means of most primitive appliances, and in some cases possess a magical value, I will give some description of them in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### AT THE "CAPITAL" OF THE AURÈS

DRESS OF THE SHAWIA WOMEN—THE SILVER ORNAMENTS OF THE AURÈS—  
MAGIC IN JEWELLERY—THE "EVIL EYE"—THE SILVERSMITHS OF  
THE HILLS—FASHIONS IN JEWELLERY—THE FEAST OF THE SPRING  
—HOCKEY IN THE HILLS—FROM MENAA TO TAGOUST—DESCENDANTS  
OF THE ROMANS—A HOLY MOUNTAIN—CAVE-DWELLERS OF THE  
MAAFA GORGE—A SHORT AND EASY JOURNEY IN THE AURÈS.

**B**EFORE proceeding to describe in any detail the barbaric silver ornaments of the Aurès which are to be found, perhaps, in greater profusion and variety at Menaa and in the Wed Abdi than in other parts of the massif, it may be well to give my readers some idea of the costumes of the women, alike in all Shawia villages, upon which they are displayed, and for this purpose I must call in the assistance of my wife, not only because she has made the garments worn herself under the direction of Shawia friends, and has often been dressed in them to ascertain exactly the native method of putting them on, but also because my masculine pen is quite unequal to the task of describing accurately the costume of any lady other, perhaps, than some I have met with years ago in the equatorial forests of Central Africa.

The universal costume of the Shawia woman consists of two garments. The first, worn next to the body, is a straight "gandoura," or shirt, of stout cotton material cut round in the neck, opening a short way at the throat

to allow it to be passed over the head, and fastened with a button.

The "gandoura" falls from the shoulders to the knees, and is usually of white material with short sleeves of "flowered" cotton, but often, in the case of a rich woman who may wish to appear more elaborately attired at fêtes, weddings, etc., short sleeves of net or some bright coloured material are attached to the "gandoura." Over the shirt the second garment or dress, if a straight piece of material can be dignified with the name, is worn. This dress consists of two lengths, of from six to ten yards each, of French cotton, black or dark blue edged with coloured braid being the most usually worn at Menaa, and these two lengths are stitched together along one side to increase the width.

One end of the material is draped over the back, a short piece being left to form the right sleeve, and is then brought full under the left arm, forming the left sleeve, and folded double over the breast so that the braided upper edge falls to the waist. This fold over the breast is caught by silver brooches on each side to the material on the back, which is drawn forward over the shoulders to meet it.

The length is then gathered full around the waist to form the skirt in even pleats, more numerous in front than at the back, and is thus brought round to the left side and held in place by a girdle of plaited wool of various colours passed several times around the waist.

The loose sleeves, formed by folds of the garment, are often tied behind the back, or tucked into the girdle while working. Although dark colours are preferred for everyday wear, bright coloured or "flowered" muslin dresses are worn by the younger women at festivals and by brides.

Shawls, usually woven at home of wool or silk and wool, but sometimes made of French net, are very commonly seen upon great occasions draped over the shoulders and fastened in front by means of a silver brooch. These we have seen dyed black for motives of economy.

Upon the head the Shawia woman often wears as many as seven coloured kerchiefs, which are draped around the head and knotted in front; black silk ones with a fringe being considered especially smart by rich women, and usually worn under the brightly coloured ones with one end hanging down the back.

To all intents and purposes the dress of the little girls is a replica in miniature of that of their mothers, but the smallest are attired only in a cotton "gandoura."

The hair, which is profusely oiled, is usually made into three plaits, which are twisted round the head and concealed by the kerchiefs, only one lock on each side of the face and a straight fringe being exposed to view, a fashion which distinguishes the Shawia women from many of the nomads, who wear thick plaits of hair, often increased by an admixture of wool, looped up in front of each ear so as to give to the face the impression that it is enclosed in a massive frame.

The shoes worn by the women of Menaâ, as we have already seen, are of red goatskin, often ornamented with bright yellow toe-caps. The trinkets displayed upon the costume described above are worthy of examination, for some have uses other than mere ornament, and some are of very ancient design. We have already alluded to a couple of brooches worn upon the breast to join the drapery upon the shoulders with that across the chest; these brooches are interesting.



The brooch consists of a sharp silver pin through a hole in the blunt end of which is passed a ring of silver, divided at one point to allow the pin (longer than the diameter of the ring) to pass from one side of it to the other; the two pieces of the dress material to be joined are transfixes by the pin, the point of which is then passed through the gap in the ring alluded to above, and the ring pushed slightly round so that the point is no longer opposite to the gap, and the pin cannot slip back, the material thus being locked in position upon the pin until the wearer chooses to turn the ring back and allow the pin to come out again through the gap.

It is interesting to note that this form of brooch is of very great antiquity. It is found to-day all over Algeria, and excavations have revealed it in such distant countries as Scotland, Ireland, and many parts of Europe, so that some students have arrived at the conclusion that it reached the Barbary States at the time of some very early invasion from the north, and I have myself found such a brooch upon a poor Shawia child at Menaa which would appear to have been buried for a prolonged period, and may even date from very early ages, having possibly been found while the child's relatives were digging the foundations of a house.

The great majority of the brooches worn are now of silver, and the blunt end of the pin is usually produced to form an ornamental "head," sometimes crescent-shaped in form, but more usually triangular, with perforated scroll patterns, the sides of the triangles being often well over two inches in length.

The brooches on the breast are worn head downwards, and their heads are usually connected with a chain to which are attached a few flat rectangular boxes of silver, ornamented with embossed designs, to hold the written

talismans without which no Algerian woman considers herself safe from magical attacks.

It is not unusual to find in the Aurès, though I have not noted the custom elsewhere, a neatly made circular silver box, containing a mirror, about two inches in diameter, suspended from one of the brooches; its lid, often very well decorated with open scroll patterns, taking the place of the cheap leather-covered mirrors in which the majority of Algerian women love to admire their beauty.

Around their necks the women of the Wad Abdi wear silver collars, from which a great number of chains hang down over their breasts, each chain ending in a small coral bead and either a scroll of silver wire or a very small pointed pendant. In addition to this many women wear a long necklet reaching to the waist, made of great numbers of home-made beads scented with musk, the beads being threaded upon several sets of strings, and arranged so that silver globes or cones connect the different sets at various points in the length of the necklet, at the lower end of which a conventionalized representation in silver of a human hand, with its fingers extended, hangs as a pendant.

In some districts these necklets are worn by brides upon their wedding day, and are subsequently used upon the occasion of festivals. The arms of the Shawia ladies are laden with bracelets, as many as half a dozen or eight pairs being sometimes worn, the bracelets consisting of solid flat bars of silver, the outer sides of which are decorated with round or lozenge-shaped bosses and with pieces of glass, usually red, let into the silver, the glass being procured from such places as Biskra and Constantine, having been manufactured in Europe for the purpose. Rings, similarly ornamented with glass, are

also worn, not only by the women, but by the majority of the men.

All but the poorer classes of women in the Wed Abdi wear two pairs of anklets, one consisting of engraved bands of silver, between two and three inches deep, and the other of plain solid silver bars, the clinking of the two as the wearer walks causing her great gratification, akin, perhaps, to that anticipated by a certain young officer who, rumour has it, was once seen entering a London shop to have his spurs tuned!

One of the great features of Aurasian jewellery is to be found in the earrings worn by all the women.

These consist of bars of silver bent almost to form a circle, the space between the two ends of which are joined by wires, upon which coral is threaded after the ring has been thrust through the lobe or the upper portion of the ear. Some of these earrings are decorated with bosses of filigree work, with coral in the centre; some have silver globes and cones threaded upon them; others are beaten out flat and serrated for ornamentation; but all are large, three inches being about their usual diameter, though I have a pair from the Djebel Cherchar which is slightly oval in form and measures five inches at its greatest depth.

Needless to say, the weight of these ornaments (three pairs of which I have once seen worn at a time) cause considerable deformity to the ear, but this is reduced as much as possible by attaching the earrings, by means of silver chains and hooks, to the kerchiefs worn upon the head.

"Head pendants," often consisting of silver stars, about two inches in diameter, from the lower points of which hang many chains like those worn upon necklets, are frequently to be seen suspended by chains and hooks

from either side of the headdress, while brow bands of rectangular silver boxes, connected by strings of coral, are commonly worn in many parts of the massif.

Upon the breast of many a Shawia woman may be seen suspended a porcupine's foot set in silver, and the eye-tooth of a dog similarly mounted.

Although silver is the metal most usually employed in the manufacture of personal ornaments in the hills, some of the wives of wealthy chiefs are to be found almost covered with similar trinkets of solid gold, the ornaments worn representing many thousands of francs in value; while the Ouled Nail dancing girls to be seen at Biskra are also in the habit of investing their gains in gold ornaments with which to beautify their somewhat unattractive persons.

Before proceeding to describe the crude method in which this by no means unpleasing Berber jewellery is produced we may, perhaps, digress for a moment in an attempt to examine the reasons for which some of the articles enumerated are worn.

Let us begin with the "hands," which we have seen are worn upon their necklets by the Shawia beauties. These, as every visitor to Algeria is aware, are worn as a charm against the "evil-eye," which is so dreaded throughout the Barbary States, but, whatever any "guide" may choose to inform his employers, they are not representations of the "Hand of Fathma," the daughter of the Prophet of Islam; indeed, they are not even called "hands" by the natives themselves, but are referred to as "fives," and are carried for the following reason.

When a native meets a person who is in the habit of bestowing the envious glance known as the "evil-eye," which is frequently followed by the direst results to its



ROSEBUD ATTILED FOR THE FEAST.



AN OULED ABDI DANCER AND HER FINERY.



victim, in order to protect himself by forestalling the coming magical attack, he will extend the fingers of one hand towards the evilly disposed person and remark "Khamisa fi aïnek" ("Five in thine eye"), the gesture being considered to be efficacious in preventing the envious glance from wreaking mischief. Perhaps in order to save the trouble of making the gesture, but more probably to carry the gesture ready made, and so available for instant use even if the threatening danger is not observed, the silver hands with the fingers extended are commonly worn in a conspicuous position by the women of Algeria, and have probably been so worn for many centuries before Fathma, daughter of Mohammed the Prophet, graced the deserts of Arabia. The small pointed pendants, which, as we have seen, are often suspended from silver collars, appear to be similarly intended to threaten the eye of the would-be giver of the envious glance, and the coral so largely used in Shawia jewellery is also worn to protect the woman from the "evil-eye," but for a different reason. The damage done by the "evil-eye" is not caused by the glance itself, but by an invisible demon which accompanies it, a "jinn" similar to that which, as we have seen, flew away with a bride and so caused a migration of the Ouled Ziane, and these demons are commonly believed to have the greatest repugnance for anything that is red in colour, a fact which seems to account for the popularity and magical value of coral, for which the Shawia will pay exorbitant prices, and also for the use of red glass set in various silver ornaments.

The effect of the envious glance is believed to be very remarkable. Belkadi, our old orderly, once purchased a new pair of French scissors and displayed them to a friend, who remarked upon their excellent quality without

attributing that quality to the favour of God; the scissors instantly broke in half as he held them! It is therefore considered extremely unlucky, and it renders the speaker liable to be suspected of giving the "evil-eye," for any one to admire a person, or a thing, without implying in some way that its beauty or value is due to the Almighty, so that the traveller in remoter districts has to be careful to avoid anything like fulsome flattery or unstinted praise, especially of children and animals.

Inanimate objects are often protected against the envious glance by a very simple form of charm, to which my wife and I always refer in conversation as a "lightning conductor"; for example, when a new house is built an old black pot is placed upon a corner of its roof in order that it may "catch the eye" of a malevolent passer-by, and so, by attracting his envious glance to itself, save the building from the evil which is threatening it.

The silver-mounted dog's tooth, which is quite commonly worn suspended from the dress, is carried as a threat to lurking demons by suggesting to them the presence of a savage creature, even demons being very subject to fear, but the reason underlying the wearing of the foot of a porcupine as a preventative against soreness of the breast in a young mother has so far defeated all my efforts to obtain a coherent native explanation of its character and its origin.

But I have already digressed too long upon the magical uses of jewellery, especially as magic will be referred to again when I take my readers to the central valleys of the Aurès massif; I will therefore turn to the manufacture of the silver ornaments, one of the chief arts of the Shawia of Menaâ.

The silversmith squats upon the mud floor of his dingy



stone-built room, blowing into flame the glowing embers in a hole in the floor by means of a bellows, consisting of an old gun-barrel, fixed in a lump of baked earth, and a skin of a kid open at one end and attached to the gun-barrel at the other, so that, by opening his hand as he draws the bag backwards by its open end, he fills it full of air, which, by closing the hand as he pushes it forward again, he forces through the barrel on to the embers, amid which the silver is melting in a little metal cup.

When the silver is molten, lifting the cup by means of a pair of tongs, he pours the liquid metal into a mould in the shape of a horse-shoe filled with oil and sand, in which he has previously made an impression of the article to be cast, the mould being divided into two parts down the centre, so that it may be opened for the moulding and the parts clamped together again when the metal is to be poured in.

Thus the brooches, etc., are very easily moulded, and only require to be finished off with the aid of a European file.

Deep anklets are beaten out upon a small anvil, and their scroll patterns are traced upon them by means of a hammer and chisel, while the solid ones are similarly beaten out from a bar of silver, but as a rule are not decorated with any elaborate design.

Although the filigree work to be found upon a few earrings at Menaa is perhaps the most difficult task the jeweller sets himself to perform, undoubtedly the most laborious is that of making the chains which are worn in such profusion in the Aurès, for the bar of silver has to be beaten with a hammer until it assumes the proportions of coarse wire, then drawn through a series of holes, decreasing in size, in a steel plate until this wire becomes sufficiently fine, and, at last, it is beaten flat, cut into

minute lengths, and hammered round the pointed end of the anvil to form the tiny links required.

Sometimes imported silver chain is to be found upon otherwise genuine native jewellery, so that, in collecting specimens of Shawia ornaments, I always carefully examine the chain-work first of all in order to observe any little irregularities in the links, none too easily noted in a really well-made chain, which would stamp it as a real example of the handicraft of a native silversmith.

Some of the metal used is silver purchased in the form of bars at Constantine, but a very large amount of the jewellery is made from broken or discarded trinkets, and silver money very frequently finds its way into the melting-pot.

In a land of survivals, such as the Aurès, it may well be imagined that fashions would remain the same, and to a great extent this is true, but nevertheless there is a distinct change taking place with regard to the large earrings, of which we have seen that several patterns are worn at Menaâ. Unfortunately this change is in favour of the flattened and serrated type of ring, which is far less picturesque than those adorned with bosses of filigree work or with hollow globes and cones, so that many fine old specimens of Shawia silver-work daily find their way to the jeweller to reappear again in the crude form which seems now to please the ladies of the Aurès.

Before the war the silver-work of the mountains was obtainable very cheaply in districts in which the fabulous prices sometimes paid in the towns are unknown.

The native himself, when he brings his own silver to the jeweller, pays him a very small sum for his work, so that should the traveller purchase an ornament with silver money he ought to obtain it for very little more

than its own weight in coin ; but the Shawia have a great dislike for paper money, which in the winter of 1919-20 was almost exclusively used in Algeria, and can only with the greatest difficulty be persuaded to sell their jewellery for it, even at prices which are utterly absurd, so that an offer of twenty francs in paper will probably not tempt a native to part with an object whose weight is equivalent to ten francs, or even less, although, of course, bargains can still be made with persons to whom ready money is a necessity.

During our stay at Menaa we experienced an opportunity, even better than the weddings at Beni Ferah, of seeing the women attired in their very best, for we were in the village during the three days of the annual Feast of the Spring, which is held at the end of February. Late at night on the 28th of February all, or nearly all, the able-bodied women and girls of the village repaired to the juniper-studded slopes of a mountain some miles away, and there commenced to celebrate the beginning of the feast by following their ordinary and very laborious task of cutting huge loads of firewood, beneath which they staggered next morning to the village, being accompanied upon their homeward march by some tom-toms and an oboe, as well as by men armed with guns and pistols which were discharged as often as the existing shortage of powder would permit.

A halt was called a mile from the village, and, while the women rested beside their burdens, one or two young girls danced in turn to the strains of the band amid the quivering cries of the female spectators.

The crowd by this time had assumed considerable proportions, for many men and boys had come out to meet their mothers, wives, and sisters, and to accompany them with every sign of rejoicing to Menaa. It was

noticeable that every one carried with them some sprig or shoot of a plant, emblematic, no doubt, of the life which recommences after the dreary months of winter have gone by. On arrival at Menaâ the women scattered with their burdens to their own homes, while the musicians and a goodly concourse of men and boys visited the "zawia," before which the "band" gave a brief performance, and then returning to the village they stopped in a little open space on the edge of the very steep western slope of its rocky mound, where they were rejoined by many of the women, to listen to the music, squatting upon the ground, or perched upon the roofs of the surrounding houses.

It would almost appear that the Shawîa choose their rendezvous for gatherings of this kind with the skill of a trained producer of spectacular plays, for I have always noticed that open-air functions, in which dancing takes place, are held so that a wonderful natural background of mountains or of distant views enhances the picturesque character of the scene.

The Spring Feast at Menaâ was an example of this natural instinct for the picturesque. In the brilliant light of the midday sun the Shawîa gathered round the band on the slope, with a wonderful view of a wild rocky valley, in which the blossom gleamed white beside the stream beneath the towering juniper-studded slopes of the mountains, in the background. From every coign of vantage men and boys in clean white garments eagerly watched the slow movements of a gaily dressed dancer, while the crowds of women, seated apart from the men, with their gay kerchiefs of shades which never seem to clash, their bright dresses, and their mass of silver chains, anklets, bracelets, and brooches reflecting in many a gleaming point of light the powerful rays of the sun,

added just that gorgeous medley of colour which seemed necessary to complete the barbaric splendour of the scene.

The dancers at Menaâ were all girls of the village itself, for the Kaïd had refused admittance to quite a number of professionals from the Wed Abdi, who had arrived before the fête hoping to realize large sums of money by dancing at it, for he looks with disfavour upon these very unrestrained ladies and the brawls which their presence so frequently entails. The dancing, therefore, was not as skilful as it would have been had the professionals performed.

The second day of the feast resembled the first, save that few women went overnight to the hill and that the music and dancing was attended mainly by children, all, including the tiniest, of the girls being most resplendently attired in their mothers' or sisters' clothing and silver ornaments. Never shall I forget the ridiculous appearance of some of the smallest!

Their heads adorned with numerous kerchiefs, their little bodies swathed in bright dresses which were ordinarily worn by full-grown women, and their limbs, heads and breasts covered with all the silver jewellery the family could produce, some of the poor little creatures presented a picture quite as pathetic as gay. Indeed, one little mite we found after the dancing had ceased sitting almost in tears beside the track, utterly unable to stagger the few remaining yards to her home beneath the weight of the finery she was almost concealed by until she had rested by the way.

Another young lady, upon whom finery sat heavily, was a child of about five, who lived near the bordj, and rejoiced in the name of Rosebud. As we had come to know her, Rosebud was one of those children who are

never happy unless their persons are in an indescribable state of dirt; and Rosebud was always very happy indeed. Wearing nothing but a gandoura many sizes too small for her and black with grime, her unkempt hair flying in the wind, she was always running in and out of the courtyard of the bordj, playing with her dog, throwing stones at every one else's dog, and getting into any mischief she could find.

Upon the morning of the second day of the Spring Feast, when I looked out of the bordj gate, I beheld a remarkable apparition. Standing still (because she could scarcely move), her head swathed in silken scarves, her body rigid in a large clean dress, her person almost obscured by silver trinkets, two pair of anklets almost slipping from her feet, was Rosebud—*clean!* Whether it was the finery she was wearing, or the ablutions she had recently endured, I cannot say, but something induced the poor little thing to burst into tears, as she took my hand to be brought for inspection to my wife.

Even in the Aurès it seems to be as necessary to suffer to be beautiful as in the gayest cities of the west.

In the evenings during the Spring Feast is played at Menaa and elsewhere in Algeria the game called "Koorá," which very closely resembles hockey, and is of very great antiquity. At Menaa the game is taken very seriously indeed. The opposing sides, consisting of any number of men and lads, face each other in a depression near the village, through which the road now runs and thus provides them with an arena for their warlike game.

The ball, usually a stone, has to be propelled to one or other of the very ill-defined boundaries, which take the place of goals, by means of bent stieks, often large and fearsome-looking weapons cut from rough juniper branches on the hills.

The game is the most dangerous one I have yet seen.

Apparently unhampered by any rules, the combatants, as they might reasonably be termed, fling themselves at the ball, slashing right and left with their club-like sticks, those unable to get at the ball itself seeming just as contented to belabour those who impede their way.

After a time upon the first occasion on which I watched the *mêlée*, both sides frankly left the ball to itself and commenced a very good representation of a mediæval 'prentices' dispute, until the Kaïd, remembering that a vendetta may follow an accident and that he was personally responsible for the order maintained in his village, ordered the game to be stopped, and I produced from my pockets the bandages I had been advised to bring with me and proceeded to deal as well as I could with the casualties, eight in number, who came to me for assistance.

There appeared to be no ill-will resulting from the game, but had it continued the consequences might have been serious.

The young women and girls also indulge in "Koorá" at this period of the year, playing near the bordj, with no spectators other than a few women and some passers-by. Doubtless in a desire to display their prowess at the expense of a Roumiya, as all white women are called in Algeria, some of my wife's friends invited her to join them in their game, and were all agog with excitement and sly amusement when she agreed.

But the Shawía ladies were unacquainted with the pastimes of an English girls' school, which pastimes are not easily forgotten, so that their astonishment was unbounded when my wife scored the first goal and immediately followed it up with a second, for the Shawía had no idea of defence, nor, indeed, of any of the tricks of

hockey as "scientifically" played in England. This game, I think, greatly increased their respect for my wife, and did something to cement the numerous friendships she had made at Menaâ.

Menaâ, as we have seen in the last chapter, can be approached by two distinct routes from the south, one from Djemora and the other from Beni Ferah; it can similarly be left by two other tracks, one leading up the valley of the Wed Abdi to Batna to the north, the other to Tagoust at the southern end of the Bouzina valley, and thence to the Batna-Biskra railway through the defile of Maafa to the west. The first of these two routes, when the high passes are clear of snow, is already accessible to motor traffic, but the second can only be traversed by mule, and it is with a description of the latter that I will conclude this chapter, reserving an account of our wanderings around Bouzina and in the Abdi valley for the pages which follow.

One gloriously fine morning in March, when a spell of really warm weather set us thinking of procuring topees when next we came out of the hills and which heralded the approach of summer, never too unbearable at such an altitude as Menaâ, we left the "capital of the Aurès," and, riding along the road over the new stone bridge which spans the Bouzina River, we marched northwards up the Abdi valley for a mile or so before turning to the north-west to commence the ascent of the steep ridge which lies between that valley and the Wed Bouzina, whose stream is too liable to flood to render its gorge a safe passage for mules to Tagoust.

The panorama of the Abdi valley was magnificent. Deep-green fields of corn, trees snow-white or pink with blossom, great grey rocky hills with forests of juniper and ilex upon the higher slopes, glimpses of snow-clad



peaks to the north; a scene as different from the barren land of Djemora as any one country could well provide, and, in its way, of a beauty that cannot be exceeded in the Aurès, for it betokened some degree of prosperity, while many of the great valleys of the southern part of the hills are at once magnificent and forbidding, desolate as well as grand. A good track and willing beasts soon brought us over the ridge, along the edge of a defile on its farther side, and so to a distant view of the gardens and gleaming minaret of Tagoust, lying in a broad valley at the foot of a frowning wall of red cliffs towering over the village to the east. Forging the stream as we neared the village we rode on through Tagoust itself to the White Hamlet, a small village in which is situated the house of the chief. Although we had not previously approached Tagoust from Menaâ, we had visited the place before, and were, accordingly, welcomed as old friends by the Kaïd, who provided us with accommodation in his home and entertained us to meals of quite a sumptuous character.

This chief of Tagoust, who holds sway all over the Bouzina valley, is a magnificent specimen of a man; very tall and broad in proportion, he is one of the most commanding figures I have seen, while a flowing white beard adds considerably to the stateliness of his appearance. I spent most of the few days we passed at Tagoust in obtaining from the chief some notes upon the history of some of the Shawîa tribes to add to those I had obtained elsewhere, which, while scarcely of sufficient interest to warrant their inclusion in these pages, are noteworthy in that they corroborated some statements made by other natives that a number of Shawîa tribes claim direct descent from the Romans.

Beyond the fact that scattered Roman settlers very

possibly have left an infusion of their blood in the veins of the inhabitants of the Aurès, there seems to be little evidence yet available to show that any one tribe can substantiate a claim to such descent, but the natives themselves regard with no little pride their boasted Roman ancestry.

Tagoust itself, a true Shawia village, is built of stones fairly well trimmed, and it is one of the neatest villages I have seen in the Aurès, but it contains little to interest the casual visitor if he has previously seen Shawia settlements elsewhere; instead of spending much time in it, therefore, he will probably continue his journey to the railway at Maafa.

The track upon leaving Tagoust rises steeply, zigzagging up the rocky side of a mountain, till it reaches a high-lying valley, the northern portion of the main valley of Bouzina, from which the defile of the Maafa cañon leads the traveller to the west. As he rides up this steep hillside the wanderer will be travelling upon holy ground, for he will be ascending the north-eastern spurs of the Djebel Bouss, a mountain which is greatly revered over a wide extent of country in eastern Algeria.

At a certain date in every year a pilgrimage takes place to the tomb of Sidi Yahia, the great saint of Maafa, following which the pilgrims betake themselves to the hallowed slopes of the Djebel Bouss in order to obtain some of the holiness which the mountain is believed to be capable of bestowing upon the faithful. Just before entering the defile that leads to Maafa the track by which the Ouled Ziane nomads move northwards in the spring and southwards in the autumn in their migrations with their flocks and herds to and from the northern slopes of the Aurès will be found very clearly defined by walls of stones, so that the herdsmen shall have no excuse for

allowing their animals to stray and inflict damage in the fields of the Shawia. The gorge of Maafa itself, studded with juniper and other trees, winding for some miles between precipitous cliffs, is certainly extremely picturesque, but the most interesting point to be noted in it by the student of native manners and customs is the existence of some cave-dwellings, which are inhabited to-day.

These dwellings are situated upon a ledge half-way up the cliff-side which is provided with a natural roof in the form of overhanging rocks, so that all that the Shawia have had to do in order to provide themselves with houses has been to wall up the front of the ledge level with the face of the cliff. A spring or two in the defile furnishes the cliff-dwellers with water, so that they merely lead the same existence as their compatriots whose nest-like villages overhang the streams in the valleys which we are to examine in a later chapter in the centre of the Aurès massif. Nowadays, under the rule of the French, such dwellings are by no means necessary, but of old there was much desultory fighting between the peoples of Tagoust and of Maafa, so that an inaccessible or easily-defended village was a necessity to the dwellers in this once troubled land.

I have read that the natives find it necessary in some places in this valley to be hoisted by cords in order to reach their homes in the face of the cliff, but I have seen nothing myself to substantiate the statement.

The cave-dwellings are difficult enough to reach it is true, but I do not think any Shawia would permanently inhabit a place in which even his goats could not move in and out, while should this tale refer to the disused rock-dwellings at Maafa itself, I can only say that my wife and I have managed to get to most of them

wearing boots which had not even soles of rope or of rubber; and that some others, inaccessible to-day, have only become so through the crumbling of the rocks which has occurred since their inhabitants had forsaken them.

Maafa itself, situated just at the western end of its defile, where the gorge expands into a wider valley with less precipitous sides, consists of three hamlets built, as are Beni Ferah and Menaa, upon eminences in the valley, one of them lying a mile or so farther down the ravine and containing the mosque and "zawia" of Sidi Yahia, the famous holy man whose tomb, as we have seen, is a noted place of pilgrimage. The mosque has been rebuilt by the French authorities, and presents little of interest to the traveller, while the zawia merely consists of a group of ordinary Shawia huts.

The valley of Maafa and its long defile are beautiful enough, especially when spring clothes its numerous fruit trees with blossom, and, although the only accommodation available is a small room in the house of the chief who, like all Kaïds of the Aurès, is very hospitable to his guests, the place is well worthy of the attention of a traveller who can spare the time to examine one Shawia settlement only.

As the village lies but an hour and a half's walk from the railway "halt" which bears its name, it can be visited in a day from El Kantara, the traveller leaving the "Mouth of the Desert" by the early morning northward train and returning by the train which goes down towards Biskra after dark.

When we stayed for a short time at Maafa, at the conclusion of a spell of work in the hills, we rode down to the little railway "halt," and, sending Belkadi northwards to his headquarters at Aïn Touta, went down by



CAVE-DWELLINGS, MAAFA.



SPRING-TIME, MAAFA.



train to El Kantara to rest after our wanderings and to prepare for a further journey in the Aurès.

The reader who has followed me up to this point in my narrative will have found sketched for him a short mule journey, which can be undertaken by any one who is not wholly dependent upon the comforts of hotels, and which will reveal to him more of the native life and varied scenery of this part of Algeria than any journey of its length that can be undertaken. None of its stages are long or difficult, and all are through a country whose beauties cannot even be suspected by the traveller on the railway, for the Aurès massif jealously hides the glories of its views from all who do not care deliberately to seek them out. The journey can be made easily in six days without undue fatigue, or it could be completed in three days by sleeping at Djemora and Menaâ, merely passing through Beni Ferah and Tagoust on the way.

Any one desirous of obtaining, in a short time, a glimpse of Shawîa life should find this little journey well worth the undertaking, but the autumn or the spring should be the season selected, for the higher villages are cold in the depth of winter.

## CHAPTER V

### FROM MENAA TO THE HOME OF A SAINT

VILLAGES OF THE WED ABDI—THE FORESTS OF THE UPPER AURÈS—OULED ABDI MORALS—WEAVING IN THE AURÈS—TIJDAD—MARABOUTS AND THEIR ORIGIN—THE HOLY MAN OF TIJDAD—THE MARABOUT'S LUCKY RING.

THE traveller who seeks the higher ridges of the Aurès, in preference to returning to civilization and the railway through the gorge of Maafa, will notice as he rides up the road which, as we have seen, has reached Menaa from the north-east, a remarkable similarity in the appearance and siting of the numerous Shawia hamlets which, built high upon the side of the rocky hills forming the eastern wall of the Abdi valley, overlook the stream as it winds through a narrow strip of cultivated land besprinkled with apricot and other fruit trees.

Built each upon a spur formed by the junction of some small ravine with the main valley of the Wed Abdi, the hamlets were well enough situated from the point of view of defence in the old days of inter-tribal war, and, being Berber settlements unaltered by any Arab influence such as we noticed in the mud-brick sometimes used at Beni Ferah, they all consist of clusters of tiny cottages built of stone, often quite untrimmed, such as the traveller will find to be the ordinary Shawia dwelling all over the heart of the Aurès massif. The villages of



the Wed Abdi are interesting enough, and visits to them have enabled us to observe a number of the arts and crafts of their inhabitants, the valley itself, however, as we marched up it from Menaä, became less beautiful as we ascended it, the blossom on the fruit trees and the narrowing belt of green beside the stream providing the only touches of colour in a grey wilderness of rock, but a very few miles distant to the eastward are to be found high-lying valleys in the range of hills separating the valley of the Abdi from that of the Wed el Abiod, which afford another contrast in scenery almost parallel to the abrupt change from Africa to southern Europe noticed in our short ride from Djemora to Menaä.

We found an opportunity of visiting these valleys during a brief expedition in search of the wild boars which roam in considerable numbers about them, but which cannot exist in the all but waterless country around El Kantara, the home of the Barbary sheep and the gazelle.

Riding up the road one afternoon at the beginning of March we halted at the village of Chir by the wayside, half a dozen miles from Menaä, the Kaïd of which hamlet had agreed to conduct us to Taghit Sidi Belkheir, another village of his domain, in the area in which pigs were to be sought.

We found the Kaïd ready to start, and accompanied by eight or ten members of his "goum," or body of irregular troops, we hastened on our way in order to arrive at Taghit in time for a good night's rest before hunting in the morning.

Turning to the eastward a mile or two above Chir we left the road and, fording the Abdi River, rode up a precipitous track to the village of Nouader, one of the line of hamlets which, often no more than a mile or less

apart, overlook, as we have seen, the valley from its steep eastern side.

At Nouader we found a very passable imitation of a road winding along a ledge on the hillside up a tributary ravine, at the junction of which with the Wed Abdi Nouader lies. This road, in a state of disrepair when we saw it, had been cut by the French to enable the produce of a mercury mine at Taghit to be conveyed by wheeled traffic to the main road from the Wed Abdi to Batna and the railway, but the mine had been closed down for some considerable time when we visited Taghit, and the track that leads to it had been neglected in consequence during the war, most of the buildings which had been occupied by the little colony of mining engineers between the two hamlets of Taghit, however, had been looked after by Shawia guards, so that we found at least a better lodging than can be obtained in a Berber cottage when we rode into Taghit in the moonlight and halted at the former residence of a Frenchman.

Here we were soon comfortably installed in a room which boasted a fireplace that did not smoke, a convenience which we should certainly not have enjoyed in a native hut, and before turning into our blankets consumed the provisions we had brought with us in front of a heap of blazing juniper logs, for, despite the most luxuriant peach and almond blossom I have ever seen, which we found next day in the garden of our lodging, the night was distinctly cold at the considerable altitude at which the mines of Taghit lie.

Next day, as the light of early morning increased sufficiently to enable us to observe the country round, we left the mines and, passing through the main hamlet of Taghit clustered round the minaret of a mosque reared to the memory of Sidi Belkheir, the Moslem saint,

after whom the villages and ravine—in the Shawia language “taghit”—are named, we found the natives and the dogs, with whom we were to search for boar, awaiting our arrival upon a track which led eastward to the higher slopes of the hills. We then continued our way until the ravine in which the mines are situated expanded into a little basin, fertile by comparison with the Abdi valley, for its greater altitude ensured it an ampler rainfall, surrounded by steep hills which revealed to us the third variety of scenery which the massif of the Aurès will display to those who pry into its secrets, namely the forests of the northern and higher portions of the range.

We have attempted to give the reader some idea of the African oasis of Djemora, from the shade of whose date-palms the traveller passes in so short a journey to the southern European scenery of Menaa, and as we take our readers to the great cañon of the southern-central part of the massif we shall again show him a glimpse of Africa, this time inhabited by fair-complexioned Berbers, but here, on the heights above Taghit, we lead him to a land clothed in a vast forest of pine and cedar, amid which the lighter green of other forest trees breaks the somewhat monotonous grandeur of the scene, while the snows of Ichemoul, the great mountain at the head of the Wed el Abiod, lend an almost Asiatic character to the panorama of woodland which is spread before his gaze.

I think that after months spent in the glare of a desert, or amid the stunted ilex and juniper trees with which the country around Beni Ferah and the Wed Abdi is studded, I experienced more pleasure in travelling through a real woodland at Taghit and on the northern slopes of the massif than I should have believed possible for any one who has sweltered for two years in the heart of the great

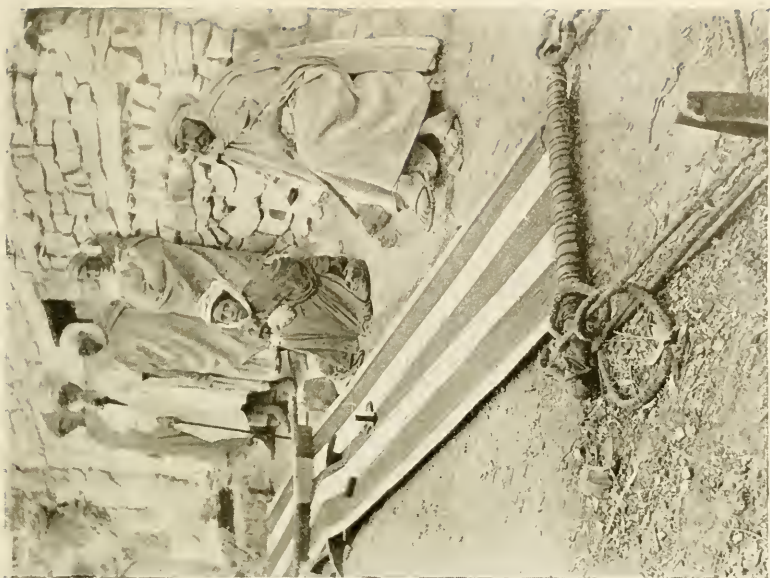
equatorial forest of Central Africa, the damp depressing climate of which, I thought, had years ago removed any partiality I may have had for woodlands in general.

Amid pleasant surroundings, therefore, we commenced our search for boar, using the dogs to follow up their tracks and to bring the animals to bay in order to enable us to get a shot at them when, breathless and perspiring, we had struggled up the steep wooded slopes in the direction of the short sharp yelps which denoted that the dogs had obtained a view of their quarry.

A long morning's hunt having resulted in a boar falling to the Kaïd and another to me, we retraced our steps to the mines of Taghit, and so to the Abdi valley, to continue our work, after a brief but thoroughly enjoyable respite from research on the forest-clad slopes of higher Aurès.

A few miles above Nouader, on the same side of the Abdi valley and similarly situated upon the angle formed by a tributary ravine, lies the important village of Teniet el Abed. It is one of the largest hamlets, for the settlements of this district can scarcely be dignified with a worthier name, occupied by the Ouled Abdi tribe, and, in common with most places in the valley to which that tribe has given its name, it bears an unsavoury reputation.

In the course of my narrative I have frequently had occasion to refer to the performances at weddings and other feasts of dancers of the Ouled Abdi tribe, ladies whose unrestrained habits had caused them to be excluded from the great Spring Feast at Menaa, a village whose inhabitants pretend to Roman origin, and who deny that they are at all closely related to the Shawia farther up the Abdi valley. Now these dancers, who are always picturesquely attired in the gay colours and silver jewellery which we have noted else-



WEAVING TENT CLOTH IN THE STREET.



NOUADER AND THE ABDI VALLEY.



where, and who are often really pretty, even when judged by the European standard to which, as representatives of an ancient white race, I presume they are entitled, have been made the subject of many strange rumours in which the wildest imaginable orgies of vice figure with astonishing prominence, rumours which I am not yet in a position to confirm or to deny from any evidence I have been able to collect. These women are very numerous indeed in the Wed Abdi, and also seek their fortunes much farther afield, and, as far as I can see at present, their existence is due to a naturally voluptuous disposition combined with the very great ease with which divorce is obtainable in the Aurès; against this simple suggestion, however, we have to set the fact that other neighbouring and kindred tribes may almost be regarded as models of virtue compared to the Ouled Abdi.

The existence of the unrestrained woman is fully recognized in the Wed Abdi, and, as we have seen, their presence is even welcomed at weddings in other parts of the Aurès; no attempt, therefore, is made by the dancers to conceal their profession, and we became acquainted with quite a number of the belles of the western Aurès during our wanderings up and down its valleys. We did not, however, learn much of interest from them, though among their more staid sisters of Teniet el Abed we were able to carry on our studies of Shawia arts and crafts. While pottery making, which we noted at Beni Ferah and many other villages, is very commonly carried on by Shawia women, it is not absolutely universal; the weaving of woollen material, however, can be creditably performed by every Shawia woman we have met with.

The white-hooded cloaks worn by all the grown-up male population of Algeria, as well as the shawls or

haïks of silk, or of stripes of silk and wool, affected by both sexes in the richer households, while the texture of them varies, of course, in accordance with the thickness of woollen threads employed, are all manufactured upon a very primitive hand-loom by the women-folk of the wearers' homes.

The wool, clipped from the owner's sheep, whose backs are sometimes covered by pieces of old sacking, etc., should it have been necessary to shear them in cold weather, is first washed in the stream, and, when dry, it is combed by drawing it by hand through a line of coarse iron spikes set up in a flat piece of wood for the purpose, after which it is "carded," that is to say, rolled to and fro between two flat boards, each about eight inches square, studded with innumerable fine wire points, the boards being provided with handles to allow of easy manipulation. After this it is ready to be spun. The little snowy tufts of wool, fresh from the carding process, are wound around a plain piece of cane about eight or ten inches in length, to the top of which in some villages, such as El Kantara, a few cock's feathers are attached as ornament, and, holding this simple distaff aloft in her left hand, the Shawia woman plies the spindle by giving deft turns of the fingers of her right hand to a pendant stick attached to the wool on the distaff by the thread which it spins as it turns.

One of the commonest sights in an Aurès village is that of a group of women engaged in these three processes of preparing wool for the loom, perhaps one of the party, anxious to commence work upon a garment, having called in the assistance of her friends to help her hurriedly to make ready for the actual weaving, and it was while making as detailed inquiries as possible, to be published, we hope, some day, of the technicalities of



spinning and weaving that my wife and I made many friends among the women of the hills.

When spun the threads which are to act as the "warp," or vertical threads upon the simple upright loom, are stretched between the two heavy wooden beams, of which this loom consists, the upper beam being suspended from two uprights of wood placed near a wall in some corner of the dingy Shawia cottage, while the lower beam is held down by pegs thrust through these uprights.

By means of an ingenious contrivance a simple movement of a stick allows the "odd" and "even" vertical threads to be drawn forward alternately as the "weft," or lateral threads, are passed by hand between them, no "shuttle" being employed by the Shawia or the Arabs of the desert. One, two, or even three women may be found working at one hand-loom in any cottage of the hills, seated in the narrow space between the loom and the wall, often nursing a baby as they deftly pass the weft between the warp threads and beat it down upon its predecessors with the aid of a heavy iron-spiked implement, which, from its weight and from the apparently careless way in which it is used, might well be expected to tear to shreds the newly-woven fabric on the loom.

It may seem strange to any one unacquainted with the vicissitudes of a traveller's life in out-of-the-way corners of the world that upon leaving Teniet el Abed, a village famous mainly as a home of notorious sinners, we should immediately become the honoured guests of a saint.

We had intended to cross the rocky ridge which forms the right wall of the Wed Abdi and stay for a time in the village of Bouzina, which gives its name to the neighbouring valley to the north-west, but we received through Belayed, the orderly who was then accompanying us,

such a pressing invitation from a celebrated marabout, named Boubish, to visit him at his hamlet of Tijdad, some two miles from Bouzina, that we determined to fall in with his suggestion and so, perhaps, see something of the blameless life for which the Moslem saints are believed to be celebrated, as well as finding further opportunities for general inquiries in one of the small places in which old customs and crafts persist more hardily than in the larger centres. We found Tijdad small enough to suit the most enthusiastic worshipper of the quiet of rural life.

Situated upon the steep north-western slopes of the great grey ridge, studded with juniper and ilex bushes, which we had crossed on our way from the Abdi valley, the score or so of tiny cottages, overlooking a narrow stream, are scarcely discernible from a distance, the grey stone of which they are constructed being of the same colour as the surrounding rocky hills.

The village is built upon no special plan, the houses lying huddled together on the slope, the roof of one upon the same level as the floor of its next-door neighbour, as is the case in many Shawia mountain settlements, but if the village itself presented few features of interest, we may at least examine an individual house as being typical of a Berber dwelling of the western Aurès in a village apparently quite uninfluenced by foreign ideas of modern or mediæval times.

Built of untrimmed stones, the interstices between which are filled in with mud, the walls include one or two strata of small beams with a line of sticks beneath them, the sticks running transversely through the wall, the object of which is to add some solidity to an otherwise rickety building. Supported by rough beams of juniper, sustained by two or more juniper trunks according to the size of the room, a number of thinner branches

of the same tree act as laths to the earth with which the roof is covered ; the roof being flat and unprotected from the gaze of the passer-by by any wall or parapet, such as we have noticed in the Arab houses of El Kantara, for the heavy winter snow would soon soak through the roof should a parapet hinder its removal, and, as we have seen, the Berbers do not hide their women as do the Arabs of the plains.

The windows, if such exist, consist of one or two small rectangular or triangular openings near the roof in each of the four walls. As we pass through the roughly-hewn wooden door of such a house, a door fastened by one of the quaint wooden locks, whose tumblers are lifted by means of projections upon a wooden key, to be found all over Algeria, in Egypt, and elsewhere, we enter a small rectangular apartment, often the only one the house can boast of, which is smoke-begrimmed and dingy to an extent that must be seen to be believed.

Of furniture there is no more than in the Arab houses of El Kantara ; some large halfa-grass baskets, plaited at home, in which are stored grain, dried figs or apricots, and other garden produce, a vertical loom set up beside the wall, a stone quern, some pottery utensils, roughly fashioned agricultural tools, a goatskin churn hanging from a tripod of branches, a hanging basket to serve as a cradle, such will be found to be the usual household possessions of a poor Shawía family, possessions which differ little if at all from the goods and chattels to be found in an Arab establishment of a similar kind.

Along one side of the apartment runs a line of stakes forming a fence, a yard, or perhaps two yards, from the wall, with which the top of the fence is connected by means of a platform of sticks. Upon this platform the family sleeps upon old sacks and a rug or two, while in

the small enclosure beneath them, formed by the wall and the fence, the goats and sheep, as well as chickens, cats, etc., are housed at night, the animal warmth arising from their bodies apparently affording some comfort to their ill-clad owners sleeping above them during the severe cold of the mountain winter, although the traveller himself, when once he has experienced a few nights in such surroundings, will probably decide that cold is the least of the evils which night-time can bring with it in the Aurès.

It would be superfluous to add that the interior of a poor Shawia cottage is as filthy as can be imagined, and far more filthy than can be described.

The houses at Tijdad afforded us an opportunity of noting the most primitive, and therefore the most interesting, type of dwelling used in the western portion of the Aurès massif, but we were fortunately not obliged to hire one of them as a temporary abode, our host, the marabout, having provided us with accommodation in the shape of an empty room built upon the flat roof of his own house. This apartment, built of stone like all the houses around, measured some sixteen feet by eight, and was provided with a very small window at one end, which, even at the very end of March, the cold at night compelled us to block up, and it contained no furniture whatever, other than a rug and some halfa-grass mats upon which to sit. Here we spread our blankets and settled down, making ourselves fairly comfortable, for the room was clean compared to the ordinary Shawia house, and, remarkable to relate, the rug was untenanted. But if our slumbers were undisturbed by any occupant of the rug, they were, to put it mildly, considerably curtailed by the persistent efforts of some rats to dine off the candle which, stuck into the neck of a bottle,

stood beside my wife's head, the unwelcome visitors even climbing upon her hat, which lay at hand, in order to reach the tallow. Had we much horror of rats we should have avoided the task of studying native life in such places as the Aurès, so realizing that these creatures must be expected, even in the houses of the holy, we merely asked our saintly host next day if he would lend us the services of a cat for the defence of my wife's hat and the candle. The following evening, as we were about to retire to rest, the cat was flung into our room.

A more savage specimen of the so-called domestic cat I have never yet beheld. It hissed and swore at our every movement, and, despite all the soothing words addressed to it by my wife (who had hitherto liked cats), its growlings kept us awake throughout the night quite as effectually as the activities of the rats, so that, called upon to decide which of the two should be permitted to annoy us, we agreed at once that an army of rats were to be preferred to one Shawia cat; the latter, therefore, was removed at dawn by a native, whose arm it ripped open in the process of capture, and we resigned ourselves and our candles to our first tormentors for the future.

Living in a room built upon the holy roof as the guests of the saint himself, we enjoyed an excellent opportunity of obtaining some insight into the life of a man who we found to be interesting as a fair type of the class to which he belonged.

Although the word "marabout" is easily the most used Arabic term employed by the tourist in Algeria, it seems probable that very few European visitors to North Africa are acquainted with the precise meaning of the word, a meaning which indicates the origin of the class to whom it is applied, and almost as few know how to give it its correct pronunciation, "mrābāt."

To give my readers a clear idea of the origin of the class of holy men to be found all over Algeria to-day, I must refer them to a translation of the work of an eleventh-century Arabic author, El Bekri, prepared by the eminent French orientalist, de Slane. In the early days of Arab conquest the extreme frontiers of their far-flung dominions were guarded from the attacks of the infidel by means of a chain of block-houses, known in Arabic as "ribat," from a verb-root signifying "to bind together."

Those Moslems who wished to display the greatest possible devotion to the holy cause volunteered to serve in these remote outposts of their faith, and during the intervals of actual warfare applied themselves to the study of their religion and to prayer. These occupants of a "ribat" were known as "morabet"—the spelling is de Slane's—whence is derived the modern Franco-Arabic word of "marabout," a term which is often applied nowadays to tombs of departed saints and to trees or hills which are believed to contain holiness, as well as to the living holy men themselves.

Thus the modern marabout owes the origin of his class to the devoted band of early Moslem stalwarts who, renouncing the pleasures of this world, sought hardship and banishment on the confines of the Islamic empire, some trace of their predecessors' spirit being now discernible in the hermit-like existence of certain marabouts, while the block-house may, perhaps, be considered to have left to posterity some reflection of itself in the "zawias" of certain of the greater holy men, establishments which, as we have seen, combine to a certain extent the properties of a feudal castle, a college, and a monastery.

But the title of "marabout" has at some period become

hereditary, with the result that the term is applied not only to those who really practise in all sincerity the religion to which, following in their father's footsteps, they have devoted their lives, but also to a few degenerate, dissolute scoundrels, the black sheep of the family from which they are sprung; while heredity of title has in many cases brought great wealth to the saintly families, for a well-known holy man has a very wide following of adherents who seek his counsel and who subscribe as much as they can afford in money or in kind to the treasures of the saintly house, and many a pious Moslem will leave a handsome legacy at his death to the particular marabout whose advice he believes to have benefited him during his lifetime.

The great majority of marabouts are very hospitable, not only to their followers, from whom they derive their wealth, but to the wandering stranger within their gates, indeed it is wise for the traveller in Algeria to cultivate as far as possible the friendship of these holy men, for, as we have seen, their influence is often very wide and their approval may be as helpful during a journey as their disapproval would probably turn out to be the reverse. Thus, in 1920, I joined a small group of natives in a remote village, of whom I was acquainted with only one.

His companions, though polite, were by no means effusive until my friend, having been asked who I was, remarked: "Don't you know? This is Simsim, he stayed with Sidi Lakhdar, the marabout, at Baniane, before the war." The mention of this venerable saint, whose home lay fifty miles away, at once thawed the reserve of the party of natives, who forthwith carried me off to a café to cement the friendship formed through our mutual acquaintance, Sidi Lakhdar, of Baniane. The

marabouts are sometimes supposed to possess magical powers of healing, and to be endowed with "second sight," while an amulet in the form of a slip of paper, upon which the saint has written some magic words, is believed to protect the person who wears it, sewn up in leather, or encased in a silver box, suspended around the neck; but the great power of the marabout is to be found in the advice he gives to his followers, advice which they will usually follow to the letter.

Thus, should it be possible for all the marabouts to give the same political advice to their followers, very widespread results would undoubtedly ensue, but, perhaps fortunately, there exists suspicion and jealousy, rather than unity and concord in the ranks of the holy men, so that combined action, with its probably unpleasant results, seems very unlikely to be taken in the Barbary states.

Our host at Tjidad, Ahmed ben Mohammed Boubish, appeared to be typical of the best class of marabout. Some fifty years of age, tall, with the not unpleasing face of a dreamer, he lives with his son and two wives (for celibacy does not appeal to the Algerian saints) in a manner as simple as any of his neighbours, dispensing generous hospitality to all who pass his way, but eating little himself, though indulging, perhaps to excess, in two of the luxuries of the Shawia, coffee and cigarettes of juniper leaf, the latter usually prepared for him by a follower. Most of his nights are devoted to solitary wandering upon the rocky hills, but, seated upon the opposite bank of the brook, whence he can overlook the hamlet of Tjidad, to the discomfiture of any intending sinner among its inhabitants, he spends his days in reverie or in giving counsel to those who seek his aid, many persons bringing their disputes to him instead of to a Kaïd or to the





THE HAMLET OF TIJDAD.



BOUBISH RECEIVING HIS FOLLOWERS.



French law courts, his judgment being usually accepted without question by the parties concerned.

Indeed, he is reputed to have prevented a lot of litigation among his followers, for it is said that loss of his case will inevitably punish the claimant who goes to law in defiance of Boubish's advice. Many women bring their troubles to the saint of Tijdad; being invariably received with the same grave courtesy which the marabout extends to his followers among the other sex, and he is accredited with the power of divining an applicant's difficulties before they are explained to him.

Boubish certainly seemed to me to set a very fair example indeed of the blameless life usually supposed by the faithful to be led by marabouts as a whole, and his advice, as far as I could judge from a number of instances which came to my notice, appeared to be very sound indeed, while he did not seem to abuse his position by exploiting to his own pecuniary advantage the credulity of his followers, a temptation to which many marabouts succumb.

His views on morality were strict; utterly disapproving of the customs of the Ouled Abdi dancers, he believed in the removal of temptation as the best means of combating vice, and, accordingly, he countenanced no music in his village, the oboe being considered the adjunct of the danseuse, while, in his opinion, the end-flute (the only other wind instrument of the Aurès where strings are unknown) might be expected to give rise to the practice of serenading, with its usual unfortunate result, murder, and the beginning of a blood-feud.

From what I have seen of marabouts in the Aurès, and I am on friendly terms with most of those to be found in the massif, I have arrived at the conclusion that, so long as they will continue to avoid politics, their presence

is a help rather than a hindrance to the peace and good order of the community, and that, looked at from the moral standpoint, they do far more good than harm.

While staying at Tijdad we frequently found occasion to walk over the couple of miles or so which separated us from Bouzina, and so were able to form some acquaintance with one of the greatest Berber centres of the western Aurès, the greatest, perhaps, after the progressive Menaâ.

Lying at the head of the valley which bears its name, at the foot of the horseshoe-shaped rocky wall of Mahmel, one of the highest of the Aurès hills, Bouzina is invisible until very nearly approached by the traveller from Tijdad, that is to say, from the east. As we walked along the track which leads to the town we first noticed a couple of ruined towers, evidently outworks, such as are to be seen near many an Aurès village, which had doubtless defended Bouzina in the troublous days of old, and only upon arriving at one of these towers did we become aware of the existence of a cup-like depression in the main valley, which revealed to us the village of Bouzina, built upon a knoll in the centre of it, at our feet. In this cup-like depression rises a considerable stream, flowing south-westwards to Tagoust, and thence into a gorge, which, as we have seen, leads it to its junction with the Wed Abdi at Menaâ. The houses of Bouzina, huddled together upon the knoll, are, of course, of Berber type, and they are in many cases well built, for the natives of the place are noted as trimmers of building stones, in which capacity they obtain employment in many a distant village of the hills.

But my readers have accompanied me to enough of the villages of the western Aurès; I will not, therefore, weary them with a description of Bouzina, which differs

in no essential detail from such places as Beni Ferah and Menaâ.

I will rather lead them over the Mahmel, and so to the railway, in order to invite them in succeeding chapters to explore the different settlements of the central part of the massif, settlements which will be found to be more picturesque, more remote, and, therefore, more interesting than any of the Abdi or Bouzina valleys. As we climbed into the saddle to take our departure from Tijdad our host, the marabout, appeared to be depressed, and, calling me aside, he handed me a ring from his own finger, a ring of silver in which was set a piece of blue glass, telling me that I was to keep it as a protective charm, such trinkets belonging to holy men, as well as the food they offer to their guests, being considered to contain some of the holiness, in Arabic "baraka," of their sainted owners. I thanked Boubish heartily for his present, and rode off.

As we wended our way up the narrow ledge on the hillside, which zigzags from the valley of Bouzina to the crest of Mahmel, I had been admiring the wonderful view of the broad valley which lay beneath us, and, in some doubt as to the name of a distant village or peak, I turned to inquire it of the orderly, Belayed, who was riding a few paces behind.

Touching his horse with the spur, Belayed came up to hear my remark, whereupon, I suppose, his horse bit my mule in the tail, for, next instant, the tellis upon which I was riding and I descended some yards down the precipitous rock-strewn slope, on the edge of which lay the track, leaving my mule kicking furiously on the path. Having been picked up, severely shaken, and firmly convinced that I had broken at least one rib, I was helped up to the path again, and the natives gathered

round me to inquire how much I was hurt, all the time exchanging glances among themselves.

At last Belayed said: "The marabout foresaw this. He told me he was uneasy about you, and did not wish to let you go; that is why he gave you that ring. If you had not been wearing it you must have been killed."

Nursing my rib, my temper as ruffled as my body was shaken, I was on the point of inquiring why the ring had not prevented the fall altogether, but, realizing that I really had had a remarkable escape, I decided to agree with Belayed and not to risk offending the marabout by expecting more than his powers were supposed to have done for me.

When once we had crossed the ridge of Mahmel we found ourselves at a great altitude above the sea, upon a tableland which sloped away to the wooded country to the north.

As we traversed this plateau snow began to fall—we were already in the first half of April—and we rode up to the home of another marabout on the edge of the forest in a blinding snowstorm. This marabout, though he practises agriculture rather than religion, being merely an hereditary saint, proved to be most hospitable, and quickly provided us with a hot meal and with a huge and magnificent carpet, spread before a roaring fire, to lie upon, remarking naïvely as he pointed it out: "You need not be afraid of it; the weather is too cold for fleas!"

A statement which was apparently true, for we suffered no ill-effects from contact with it before we rose at dawn to continue our way to Batna.

The track lay through grand forests of cedar, pine, and other trees, whose size, though in no way remarkable, struck us as extraordinary after our stay in a country

in which dwarf juniper, ilex, and fruit trees are the largest members of the vegetable kingdom; the region we had now entered resembling in all respects the area in which we hunted boar near Taghit Sidi Belkheir.

As we came to the summit of the slopes overhanging Batna we obtained some glorious views of the level plateau to the north of the Aurès massif, in which that French settlement lies, and, riding down these wooded slopes, we passed through the great gates in the loop-holed walls of this garrison town, finally pulling up at an hotel. Having paid off our men, and arranged for the return of Belayed to his headquarters, I took my ribs to a doctor, and my wife began to arrange our baggage with a view to returning to El Kantara by train on the morrow to pick up various cases of specimens for the museum, which, as occasion offered, I had sent there to await my arrival, thus relieving our baggage of much weight as we moved about the hills.

CHAPTER VI  
TO THE CENTRAL VALLEYS OF  
THE MASSIF

THE VALLEYS OF THE CENTRAL AURÈS—OUR RECEPTION AT BRANIS—  
IRREGULAR CAVALRY OF THE DESERT—A “FANTASIA”—FEAST AT  
BRANIS—THE “MECHWI”—MECHOUNECH, ITS OASIS AND ITS  
GORGE—A GREAT ARISTOCRATIC FAMILY—DEFENSIBLE GRANARIES  
OF BANIANE—A ROMAN “SEGGIA.”

HAVING explored the valleys of the western portion of the Aurès massif we turned our attention to those of the central part of the range, namely the great cañon of the Rassira, a stream which enters the Sahara through the gorge of Mechounech some twenty miles to the east of Biskra, and the higher valley of this same stream, known in the northern portion of its course as the Wed el Abiod, that is to say the “White River.”

To my mind the scenery of the cañon of the Rassira in its beauty and its grandeur, is not excelled by any of the other valleys of the Aurès, even if its equal can be found in any other part of Algeria with which I am acquainted, and the very heart of this great gorge lies no more than thirty or forty miles in a direct line from the crowded hotels of Biskra.

It may seem almost incredible therefore, that in 1914 my wife was said by the Shawia to be the first European woman to be seen in some of its hamlets in which we stayed, a statement amply corroborated by the eagerness



of the women, and of those who had not wandered as far as the railway, to obtain a glimpse of her.

The reason of the tourist's neglect of the area is, however, by no means far to seek.

Roads have hitherto been non-existent through the Rassira valley, and some of its mule tracks are difficult; the Kaïds of this region appear to hold authority over wider stretches of territory than in the valleys we have hitherto visited and, accordingly, the hospitality of their homes is less frequently to be found, the traveller often being obliged to hire some dingy Shawia hovel in which to live; while the "guides" of the tourist centres, as a rule, appear almost to be ignorant of the very existence of this great ravine and its interesting Berber settlements, their ignorance doubtless being increased by the lack of creature comforts to be found therein and the admitted dislike of the Shawia to these "hangers on" to Western civilization and wealth.

Nevertheless the day may not be so far distant when the rocks of the Rassira will resound to the blast of the motor horn and its cañon become one of the great spectacles of Algeria; indeed, as we shall find later on, a bordj similar to those at Djemora and Mena has already been erected in the centre of the valley; so that the wanderer in search of a glance at primitive native life and at villages unspoiled by the introduction of European ideas will be well advised to pack his blankets on a mule and betake him to the central Aurès in the van of the influx of visitors which, I think, must immediately follow upon the construction of a road passable to wheeled traffic, especially to cars.

Obviously, with Mechounech, the southern entrance to the Rassira, at so short a distance from Biskra and the track between the two lying over level desert devoid

of sand, Biskra would seem to be the ideal centre from which to approach the central part of the Aurès massif; but for two reasons we again selected El Kantara as our base for our journey into this country.

Firstly, by proceeding from the Mouth of the Desert and leaving Biskra to the south-west of our road, we should find an opportunity of visiting the oasis of Branis, another settlement of the Ouled Ziane nomad Arabs, somewhat similar to Djemora, which we had not previously seen, and, secondly, the small demand by tourists for riding and baggage animals at El Kantara would, we thought, lead to our being able to secure them at prices lower than those demanded at Biskra, prices which, though the animals were to be hired for one stage of the journey only, would be likely to increase those asked for each subsequent hiring, with the result that prices in general would be enhanced throughout our wanderings in the hills.

Upon leaving El Kantara for Mechounech we marched direct to Djemora, and there spent a week or so as the guests of our old friend Basha Bashir, subsequently moving on the ten or a dozen miles to the south to meet the Administrator of the region at the oasis of Branis. This gentleman, who has since fallen in the service of his country by the hand of an assassin, had arranged to leave his headquarters at Aïn Touta by train and, quitting the railway at El Outaya, to ride into Branis from the west while we approached the oasis from the north accompanied by the Kaïd of Djemora, attired in the scarlet burnous which denotes his office and mounted upon his best horse saddled with the most ornate harness he possessed.

Evidently the chief of Branis had decided that the simultaneous visit of his Administrator and of two British

travellers was an occasion to be marked by as much ceremonial as he could arrange for ; as we came in sight of the hillock upon which the village stands, therefore, a musket was fired from a house-top (a complimentary salute, we were carefully informed) and, as we rode through its tortuous lanes we noticed a display of the "tricolore" and a number of arches made of palm-leaves such as we had not previously met with in the Aurès. I am afraid we rather spoiled the dramatic effect intended to be produced by a meeting with the Administrator in the village itself beneath the folds of the French flag, by arriving an hour too early, but we made the best of this hour by comfortably settling into the room provided for us, partaking of a lunch which, if we could have foreseen what lay before us, we should have left untouched, and finally walking a little way along the track towards El Outaya to meet the French officer who was to arrive accompanied by the Kaïd and his "goum."

Soon the plaintive notes of the oboe and the beating of drums heralded the approach of the Administrator and his escort. Headed by a couple of mules each carrying an oboe player and a drummer, the little column came into sight round a corner of the palm groves of the oasis ; the Administrator immediately followed by the Kaïd, clad in his scarlet robe and riding with drawn sword, who in his turn was closely attended by a mounted man bearing the brightly coloured standard of the "goum," behind whom rode a score or so of the "goumiers" themselves attired, as their personal fancies dictated, in cloaks of many brilliant hues.

As the French officer dismounted to greet us the horsemen lined up and discharged their smooth-bore guns into the air while their chief gravely saluted with his sword, after which formal greeting we walked slowly

back to the village accompanied by the Kaïd, the musicians and the "goum."

The "goumier," or irregular armed follower of an Algerian chieftain, can, perhaps, best be likened to the "special constable" recruited in England to meet the requirements of a national emergency.

Certain natives of good character and undoubted loyalty are voluntarily enrolled in the area of each chief upon the understanding that they shall be called upon to serve the French in times of internal commotion under the leadership of their Kaïd. These men are provided with arms varying in character according to the locality or the services they will be required to render.

In the higher country of the Aurès the "goumier" usually serves on foot, in the northern portion of the Sahara and upon the plateau he responds to a summons to arms mounted upon his own horse, while far down in the great desert he rides the "mehari," or trotting camel, so well suited to the vast stretches of barren waste he will be obliged to cover in the execution of his duty.

Should outlaws appear in a district, terrorizing its usually peaceful inhabitants, the Kaïd will summon his "goum" to effect their capture; should one tribe in the Sahara attempt a predatory excursion into the pastures of its neighbours' flocks the "goumiers" will assist the authorities to bring the freebooters to book; and, in the extreme south, the "goums" of friendly Arab tribes have long served the useful purpose of keeping open the caravan routes despite the marauding proclivities of the Tawarek Berber nomads and have rendered signal service to the French in providing mobile columns by means of which these bandits have been driven discomfited to their far-off desert homes and peaceful traffic has been restored to the great highways of the Sahara.

But the "goumier" has not served the cause of civilization in his own land alone. Many a troop of irregular horse has accompanied the French in their various campaigns in Morocco, and in the early days of the great war many of the gaudy flags of the desert irregular horsemen fluttered in the breeze over the plains of Flanders when the manhood of all warrior nations combined to face the Hun. Although, of course, the "goumiers" who served in Flanders were fully equipped with modern weapons and with uniforms, in their own country these horsemen turn out upon mobilization attired as pleases them best, a fact which makes a ceremonial parade of the "goums" a very brilliant spectacle indeed, for every Arab cavalier loves finery and outward show as much as anything this world can offer him.

In the dazzling Algerian sunshine, beneath which no colours seem to clash, the many hues displayed by a group of desert horsemen, their gorgeous burnouses tossed from side to side by the prancing of their spirited little horses, usually kept tied up to increase their natural restiveness before any important assembly, lend a wonderful tinge of colour to the throng, their gold embroidered harness adding many a twinkling point of light to the barbaric splendour of the scene.

It is scarcely to be wondered at, therefore, that a display of horsemanship by a number of gaily cloaked warriors mounted upon horses thus brilliantly caparisoned in the wide desert beneath a burning sun should constitute one of the most gorgeous spectacles that can be found the world over.

A "fantasia," as such a display is termed, upon a very small scale it is true, was organized by the Kaïd of Branis to celebrate the arrival in his territory of the Administrator and ourselves. Upon returning to the village with

our host, having partaken of the usual cups of coffee, we ascended to the roof of a house overlooking the stream, which flows down to Branis from Djemora, whence a good view was obtainable of the level country beyond the river, the place selected for the display.

Having forded the stream the horsemen, numbering but a score or so, for the local "goum" was by no means large, lined up on our left and proceeded to gallop past us one by one, their wiry little horses urged to their utmost speed, each rider uttering a long drawn cry as he rode and, standing in his stirrups, firing blank charges from the double-barrelled shot-gun with which he was armed, one shot usually being fired over the horse's head, as if at an enemy in flight, and the second over the cantle of the saddle at some imaginary pursuer behind.

When each "goumier" had thus given his individual display the whole party galloped past in line headed by the standard-bearer, his gaily coloured banner streaming in the breeze.

This concluded an exhibition which was more remarkable for the brilliance of its general effect than for any special skill displayed by the riders who took part in it.

The Arab is by no means so accustomed to the practice of tricks of horsemanship as are the cow-boys of America and other world-famed horsemen, but he sets up a high standard of efficiency for those who desire to pride themselves upon their riding.

For example, it is said that no man can call himself a horseman who cannot perform the "fantasia," with its shooting and turning in the saddle, holding the while a coin between the sole of each shoe and the stirrup, the downward curve of the stirrup at both ends rendering this test by no means easy; while a couple of really accomplished horsemen will occasionally give the display



THE "GOUM" AT BRANIS.



COOKING A "MECHWI."





side by side, one with his right foot in his neighbours' "near" stirrup and the other with his left in the "off" stirrup of his companion.

The little impromptu "fantasia" at Branis having been brought to a close, we wandered around the village of mud brick, exactly resembling the desert villages we have already described, which forms the base of the southern portion of the Ouled Ziane nomads as Djemora constitutes the headquarters of their kinsmen immediately in the north, and at sundown we returned to the house of the Kaïd to be regaled with a feast which caused us to regret having partaken of any food for several days past. I will not weary the reader with a description of the first *nine courses*, consisting of various well-cooked stews and kuskus, our attacks upon which were encouraged by such exclamations as "Eat, eat," "You are eating nothing," "Perhaps you do not like Arab food" from our host, the Kaïd, who waited upon us in person; but I will pass on to the national "plat d'honneur" of Algeria with which the very sumptuous repast was terminated, namely the "mechwi," or lamb roasted whole. This dish, which every wealthy Arab loves to place before an honoured guest, would certainly be the most appetizing form of sustenance the traveller can meet with in his wanderings in the desert and the hills, were it not for the fact that it is almost always preceded by a number of other courses of which he has been practically forced to consume an immoderate amount and that he is expected to attack it in no half-hearted manner, despite his previous efforts to do justice to the hospitality of his host.

The lamb is cooked in the following manner. A fire of logs is made, the glowing embers of which are placed upon the ground at some distance from the fire itself. A pole having been thrust through the lamb from head

to tail, the carcase is held horizontally over the glowing embers by two men who slowly and continuously turn it upon the spit formed by the pole, one of them basting it the while by means of a tuft of wool upon the end of a stick which he dips into a bowl containing melted butter and salt. The cooking being accomplished over the embers all risk of charring the meat in the flames of a fire is obviated, while the fact that the guests have to wait upon the convenience of the cook instead of the cook upon that of the diner ensures that the lamb is eaten exactly when "done to a turn." When ready for eating the carcase is removed from the pole and placed, often standing upon the stumps of its legs, upon a large brass tray which is set in the centre of the group of guests, upon the floor in the more primitive families or upon the table in the case of most Kaïds.

No vegetables or condiments are served with the "mechwi." When the dish is served each guest, murmuring the customary "Bismillah," "In the name of God," proceeds to tear off with his fingers some of the crisp and delicious outer skin from the back and ribs, after which he tears or cuts away some of the meat from the same part of the animal, endeavouring the while, if he be a European, to convey to his host the impression that he is helping himself more liberally than is actually the case, for the Arabs expect very full justice indeed to be done to their favourite dish. It is remarkable that the flesh of the back and the ribs and the animal's kidneys are considered to be the best portions of the carcase, the hind legs and the shoulders being usually left to be finished by the servants outside, a task which they accomplish in no uncertain manner, leaving not one scrap of meat upon the bones. At the conclusion of the almost interminable feast offered to us by the Kaïd we turned in to

spend a comfortable night upon a pile of carpets spread for us in a vacant room in the chief's house, the Administrator being accommodated in the apartment used by him as an office during his tours of duty in the area, preparatory to an early start for Mechounech on the morrow.

The French officer who had met us at Branis had never before visited Mechounech, an oasis which lay outside his jurisdiction; he had arranged, therefore, to ride with us to that village where we were to meet another French official of our acquaintance who would at that time be returning to his post in the hills after a visit to Biskra.

We were quite a considerable party, therefore, when we rode out of Branis in the soft light of dawn, heading towards the level desert of the Sahara.

The greater part of this long day's journey over a stony plain with a distant panorama of the great oasis of Biskra, lying like a shadow upon the desert to south-west, almost constantly in view, was uneventful for, until we reached the lower level of the actual Sahara at the village and small oasis of Droh in the early afternoon, we came upon no sign of human life other than an occasional group of tents of the Ouled Ziane.

The natives of Droh were remarkable in that they afforded us a passing glimpse of the third human type to be found in south-eastern Algeria, namely the negroid type which occupies the long since dried up bed of the Wed Rhir between Biskra and the great desert centre of Touggourt some one hundred and fifty miles to the south.

Continuing our journey we turned to the north-east and, following more or less closely the line of the stream which flows down the central valley of the Aurès, we rode through the broken country between the Sahara proper and the foothills of the massif towards the

oasis of Mechounech at the southern end of the gorge which bears its name. Shortly before reaching the oasis a cloud of dust overtaking us from the direction from which we had come and distant cries of "Ee-oop-ee," by means of which native carriage drivers urge on their beasts, heralded the arrival of the Administrator who was to meet us at Mechounech and who, having left his horse at that village, had hired a vehicle in Biskra to convey him to rejoin it.

Upon arrival at the stream, however, which flows through the oasis and must be crossed before the traveller can enter the village of Mechounech the superiority of the humble mule over the swifter moving carriage for up-country journeys in Algeria was made manifest, for the fiacre became wedged against a boulder amid the swirling waters of the river and had to be abandoned by its passenger for, although the greater part of the track from Biskra to Mechounech, lying over the dry soil of a desert, can be easily and fairly comfortably traversed in a carriage, even the bed of the stream presenting in normal times but an inconsiderable obstacle to wheeled traffic, upon the occasion of our visit rain in the north had swollen the river to unusual proportions and thereby rendered the ford almost impassable to a fiacre.

Doubtless the track will very shortly be improved, if indeed the work has not already been carried out by the time these lines are in print, for, as we have noted, Mechounech stands at the southern gateway to one of the most remarkable districts in the whole of eastern Algeria, an area which must sooner or later become a favourite with those travellers who delight in grand scenery and strange scenes.

The oasis itself, with its many thousands of stately palms, lying at the foot of the precipitous wall of rock

which separates the Sahara from the central Aurès valleys, is one of the most beautiful to be found on the edge of the desert.

The narrow winding lanes between its date gardens, the minaret of its principal mosque gleaming white in the glorious sunshine over the tumble of mud brick huts which forms the main village combine, with its mountain background, to make up a picture of rare beauty at this point where hills and desert meet, while its wonderful gorge—the merest cleft in a great grey wall of rock through which the stream of the Rassira finds its way to the Sahara, a gorge so narrow as to offer no bridle path beside the river to the traveller who would pass through it—may well rank in its almost forbidding grandeur with any of the great defiles of the Algerian hills. But for all its natural beauty, which may soon make it the resort of the motorists of Biskra, Mechounech is not a place to appeal very strongly to the student of Shawia life.

The natives of the place, as a rule, claim to belong to the Berber race and, indeed, fair complexions and the Shawia dialect are common enough in the village, but the negroid Rhouara and Arabs from the neighbouring Zab Chergui area of the Sahara are also to be found mingled with the population, a fact which caused me to undertake few, if any, researches in the place, for I have always preferred to study the habits of the Berbers in localities as far removed as possible from the outside influence of adjacent peoples. We accordingly spent but a few days in this beauty spot of the fringe of the Sahara, in the course of which, however, we made some most interesting acquaintances, among them members of one of the great aristocratic families of Algeria, for the Kaïd of the district came of very ancient lineage indeed.

The Kaïd himself, Bou Hafs ben Chenouf, who has succumbed to a lingering illness since our last meeting with him, had his residence at the northern end of the Rassira valley, over the whole of which he held sway, but he happened to be at Mechounech at the time of our arrival, on a visit to his younger brother, its headman or sheikh, in whose house we were lodged, for the rest-house or bordj which has recently been built at Mechounech was not then in existence, and the Kaïd himself owned but a small dwelling in the oasis.

The family of ben Chenouf is one of the most respected in Algeria, and has been one of the most powerful in the days when individual chiefs held absolute sway over the land.

Of Arab descent, an ancestor having held important office under the Caliphs of Baghdad in the early Middle Ages, the ben Chenouf were a ruling family in the country they now inhabit as long ago as the fifteenth century, when the authority of the Bey of Constantine over them was probably far more nominal than real.

Upon the arrival of the French a number of influences combined to induce the family to espouse the cause of the European, a cause which its members have ever since most loyally served, so that position and honour have continued to fall to their lot up to the present day.

The head of the clan, Si Ali Bey, held the office of Bash-Agha, or overlord, near Khenchela to the north of the Aurès massif until, a year or two ago, he fell a victim to a miscreant's treacherous ball; Bou Hafs held the position of Kaïd of the Rassira and the Amar Khraddou, a very large "Kaïdat" indeed; various other members of the family of ben Chenouf hold or have held other responsible offices in the administration; and, upon our visit to Mechounech, we were invited to return later in the

year to be present at a military parade and "fantasia" at which three brothers of the family were to be decorated by the French with different ranks of the Legion of Honour for services rendered, not only at home but when in command of their "goumiers" in various campaigns in Morocco.

Thus it will be seen that the French in this instance, as in many others, have found some of their most valuable and influential supporters among the aristocracy of Algeria, among families whose word was law in the land before the advent of settled conditions and the approach of the civilization of the West, for among no people in the world is pride of lineage held in greater esteem than among the Arabs of Algeria who, I am convinced, would even prefer to be thoroughly misgoverned and taxed beyond endurance by a despot of undisputed pedigree than to be administered faithfully and well by a chief whom they could regard as an upstart or a person of inglorious ancestry.

Bou Hafs ben Chenouf entertained us royally during our stay at Mechounech. Speaking perfect French, having travelled extensively in France as well as in his own country, he was typical of the progressive Arab Kaïd of to-day, yet he never laid aside the customs of his people, dressing always in the costume of the desert and leading a life of stern simplicity in his home, when not engaged in the occupation he loved so well of entertaining an official or a guest. Anxious to resume our researches among the Berbers of the Aurès in villages in which the risks of an infusion of foreign customs into their life could be regarded as reduced to a minimum, we moved on from Mechounech to the oasis of Baniane higher up the valley of the Rassira stream, riding up the steep hillside through which runs the gorge, leaving that defile to the west for,

as I have pointed out before, the bed of a mountain torrent in a chasm of the Aurès is often dangerous in the autumn or the spring, owing to its liability to sudden flood.

Having surmounted the rocky ridge which overlooks Mechounech, with its glorious view of the Sahara stretched like a carpet at our feet, we descended to the course of the river, now flowing through a less restricted channel, and followed it till we came, after but an hour or two's slow riding, to the date gardens of Baniane and the first of the hamlets which lie scattered amidst its groves. A mere glimpse at this hamlet with its houses of stone showed us that we had returned to the land of the Shawia, while a feature of the place, unknown in the western portions of the Aurès through which we had wandered, at once arrested our attention and brought to our notice one of the outstanding differences between the villages of the Rassira and those of other parts of the massif. Upon the brink of a sheer wall of rock overlooking a bend in the river, its walls built flush with the edge of the cliff some fifty feet above the water, stood a large four-storied stone building, each story provided with a rickety balcony from which a small doorway led into the house, the whole edifice so much larger than any Shawia structure we had yet seen that we at once inquired of Belayed, the orderly who accompanied us, what its purpose might be.

It was, he replied, the "guelaa" or defensible granary of Baniane, a building which we soon discovered to be characteristic of most, if not all, of the Shawia settlements in the Rassira valley. These buildings have been called into existence by the exigencies of the troublous times before the French occupation of Algeria. Obviously rain falls more plentifully upon the





THE DEFENSIBLE GRANARY OF BANIANTE.

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hills than in the Sahara and, just as obviously, in the bad old times of inter-tribal strife, when a man's lawful possessions were those which he could acquire by means of his own right arm (or, more probably, by means of a musket-shot fired from behind a rock at the back of an unsuspecting member of some neighbouring community), the dwellers in the hills would be only too glad to turn to the fullest advantage the streams resulting from this rainfall by tapping them with the "seggias" we have already described to an extent which would allow the minimum quantity of their precious water to reach the burning plains of the south ; and this despite any agreement such as, I believe, was entered into between the inhabitants of the hills and of the desert with regard to the quantity of water which should be allowed to pass out of the mountains.

Superior, then, as are the crops of the Shawia to those of their Arab neighbours of the Sahara to-day, in the troublous times gone by they were probably very much more abundant still ; small wonder, therefore, that the nomads of the desert may often have been driven by sheer want to undertake those predatory raids the smallest occasion for which would be eagerly embraced by the warrior herdsmen to whose "goums," now under the orders of the French, we have referred in this chapter. Defensive measures to meet such raids were thus rendered necessary to the Shawia, who constructed these granaries for the purpose of storing their grain in a place in which its capture would be a task of extreme difficulty to an ill-armed foe.

To judge by the appearance of the "guelaa" at Baniane, and of others which we subsequently examined, the buildings were eminently suitable for their purpose. Its outer walls rising flush with the edge of the cliff offer

no possibility for assault to an attacking force approaching it from the river, whose flint-lock muskets would make little or no impression upon its masonry, while the balconies, used for the drying of fruit in the piping times of peace, would afford excellent accommodation to the sharpshooters of the garrison who could obtain shelter in the doorways leading out on to them should the enemy's fire become unpleasantly hot. The interior of the "guelaa," a veritable labyrinth of narrow lanes in many cases bridged by ladders of palm trunk giving access to the upper floors, provides shelter in its dingy store-rooms for the families of the beleaguered village, and the entrance to the defensible granary is usually so narrow as to enable the merest handful of determined men to withstand the attacks of the largest party of raiders which a desert chieftain would be likely to bring against them.

In considering the impregnability or otherwise of Shawia villages it is, of course, necessary to bear in mind that the long-barrelled flint-lock musket, still frequently to be found in the Aurès and the desert, was the weapon upon which its assailants had perforce to rely, the *arme blanche* of the horseman being practically useless in an assault upon a mountain stronghold whence rocks and other missiles, in addition to bullets, may be showered down by the garrison from their eerie-like position to the discomfiture of any storming party which might attempt to scale the rocks to come to grips with the defence.

The flint-lock muskets, and pistols of the same description, are so commonly used to this day by the Shawia, although many of them are retained unmarked and unauthorized by the government, that we have found a native in the fastnesses of the hills who made his liveli-

hood by chipping flints for use in them, a survival, in a more or less modern form, of a prehistoric art now well-nigh passed away before the advance of civilization, with its cartridges and percussion caps for fire-arms and its matches to replace the now rarely noticed flint-and-steel.

Close to the "guelaa" of Baniane may be seen a relic of antiquity in the form of a "seggia," still in use, hewn in the solid rock by, it is said, the hands of the Romans whose irrigation works carried out, perhaps, upon the same system which obtains to-day in the Aurès were evidently constructed with a view to the welfare of posterity rather than to economy of labour on the part of the ancient engineer; other traces of archæological interest, however, we did not discover, for our study of existing native life, necessitating a constant readiness to listen to discourses by any chance acquaintance, many of which discourses were as valueless as some others have proved fruitful, and to investigate any art or craft, superstition or rite which might present itself to our notice, occupied too much of our time to admit of our embarking upon any inquiries into matters relating to centuries long since passed which are properly the study of archæologists equipped with the training necessary to their pursuit.

At Baniane we were received by a very well-known marabout, Sidi Lakhdar, to whom I have briefly referred in a previous chapter and who welcomed us most cordially to his "zawia," which forms a little hamlet of its own amid the palm groves on the western side of the oasis. He at once provided us with a couple of rooms in which to work and to sleep, or rather to spend the night, for the carpets placed in our "bedroom" were so well populated as to render sleep impossible upon the

night of our arrival, so that it was only after tactfully explaining that we always preferred to spread our blankets upon the bare floor, and thus causing the removal of the carpets, that we were able to settle down in comparative comfort and commence our work among the Shawía.

The family of the marabout were most eager to see my wife, indeed I was asked if anything had been done to offend us because she had not expressed a wish to visit his wives immediately upon our arrival at the "zawia," so that she was able to spend much time among his womenfolk, securing as a result quite a number of silver trinkets which our host and his hospitable wives and daughters pressed upon her at the numerous "receptions" given in her honour, entertainments at which the female members of the family and their lady friends danced to the rhythmic beat of a tambourine in a manner more suggestive of the professional danseuses of the Wed Abdi than of the relatives of a great and, I believe, really worthy saint.

Old Sidi Lakhdar has remained a staunch friend to us since we first visited him in his mountain home; indeed, as I have already pointed out, his friendship has more than once secured us a welcome in villages far removed from Baniane, for his influence is very wide, and this friendship we find all the more valuable in that it was quite spontaneous and has not been called into being by anything we may have been able to do for the old man nor by gratitude for presents offered him, which latter are responsible for so many so-called friendships between natives and Europeans in North Africa. Having made a fair number of acquaintances among the Shawía of Baniane, and having become the recipients of much hospitality, we decided to attempt to return a little of

the latter by means of a "mechwi," such as we had partaken of at Branis. We, therefore, purchased a lamb for the absurdly low price asked before the war, and invited our friends to dinner.

This little feast was an unqualified success, indeed it is discussed even now, after the lapse of a number of years, whenever we meet an acquaintance from Baniane, and did much to enable me to carry on inquiries into various phases of native life in the hills of a character too technical or, it must be confessed, too indelicate to be described in any work other than a strictly ethnographical report.

Apart from our interest in our work, which kept us busy from morning until night, our stay at Baniane was distinctly enjoyable, for the place is beautiful as well as interesting. Lying at the foot of the western slopes of Ahmar Khraddou, the "Red Cheeked" mountain whose glorious shades of pink, deepening to purple at sunset, delight the eye of the hotel dwellers of distant Biskra as they gaze upon the panorama of the Aurès to the east, the great date forest of Baniane amidst and around a number of small hillocks combines some of the beauties of a desert oasis with those of a settlement of the mountain valleys.

As I have remarked, the houses of Baniane are of the Shawia type, their inhabitants also displaying, in the vast majority of cases, the physical characteristics of the Berber race, an indication that a study of the customs of the natives of the central valleys of the Aurès can be conveniently commenced there before the traveller finds his way to the remoter hamlets of the Rassira cañon itself.

## CHAPTER VII

### LIFE IN A CLIFF VILLAGE

THE RASSIRA CAÑON—A VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF—SHAWÍA WOMEN'S CURIOSITY—MAGIC IN THE AURÈS—DEMONS—AMULETS—"THE MOTHER OF THE NIGHT"—A REMARKABLE PROPHECY—DIVINATION BY A SORCERESS—EVIL SPELLS—CHARMS—CLIMATE OF THE RASSIRA VALLEY—GHOULI.

THE bridle path from Baniane to the northward, a path which may well be transformed into a road accessible to cars, led us along a wide stony valley bounded upon the east by the great ridge of the Red Cheeked mountain and on the west by the peaks which separate the Wed Abdi near Menaa from the central valley of the Aurès, a valley which for a few miles beyond Baniane, though beautiful enough for its mountain panoramas, betrayed to our gaze no sign of the wondrous scenery it contains until, turning off the main track to the eastward, we headed for our destination, the remote hamlet of Ouled Mansour.

As we rode slowly forward across the apparently level country of the centre of this valley we suddenly halted to find ourselves upon the lip of a hitherto unseen ravine, the vast chasm of the Rassira gorge yawning at our feet.

The totally unexpected arrival at the edge of a cañon some four hundred yards, as I should guess it, from lip to lip, so deep as to reduce the stately date-palms which border the stream below to the dimensions of mere oleander bushes in the eyes of the beholder on the cliff





OULED MANSOUR AND THE BASSIRA CAÑON.

To face p. 136.



edge, its sides sheer and in places overhanging, its barren rocks glowing bright in the glare of an afternoon sun, produced an impression which would require a far abler pen than mine to describe, a closer examination of the cañon revealing features as interesting as its first sudden appearance had been grand. This marvellous gorge, the merest cleft wrought by the action of its swiftly flowing stream throughout untold centuries, in which a greater rainfall had made of the river a more powerful instrument than it is to-day, runs unseen until closely approached through the central portion of the wide desert valley, to which I have already alluded, from the higher portion of that valley near the village of Tifelfel in the north to the broken ground around Baniane which we had just left behind us, numerous small water-courses, most of them now dry, from the slopes of Ahmar Khraddou forming tributary ravines which enter the main cañon from the east.

As we gazed from the cliff edge numerous tiny hamlets of stone huts were to be seen clinging to the very brink of the precipice upon the eastern or left side of the great gorge, while upon the angle formed by the gorge and a deep tributary valley, a site such as we have already noticed as a first favourite with the Shawia for the building of their settlements, the village of Ouled Mansour could be descried in the distance, perched like an eagle's nest upon the towering rock, the deep green of its date groves and more emerald patches of cultivated land beside the stream hundreds of feet beneath it affording a welcome relief to eyes strained by the contemplation of the shining grandeur of the barren rocks around.

Although but a comparatively short distance in a direct line lay between us and our destination when we first came suddenly upon the brink of the Rassira gorge,

it was necessary to wander many a weary step before we could reach it, for Ouled Mansour lay upon the farther side of the cañon, a descent into which could be made by very few and precipitous paths; accordingly we rode for some time along the very edge of the overhanging cliff, a track on which the nervous traveller, or one whose head is not thoroughly to be trusted in such localities, will do well to close his eyes and rely upon the sagacity of his mountain-bred mule to bring him in perfect safety to the point at which a narrow boulder-strewn path zigzags from the cliff edge down to the stream beneath. Arrived at this point we dismounted, for the track was one of the few mule paths I have seen in the Aurès upon which I have more confidence in my own feet than in those of even the surest beast, and scrambled down to the gardens and the river; our approach, which had been noticed long since in the village, causing a small crowd to assemble on the housetops high above us on the opposite cliff, while two or three men hastened down from the hamlet to meet us.

Arrived beneath the grateful shade of the palm trees we mounted to ford the river, some fifteen yards in width, whose swiftly flowing waters almost washed the bellies of our mules, and on its eastern bank we were greeted by the headman. The Kaïd, Bou Hafs, as we have seen, had his residence farther to the north, so that at Ouled Mansour there was to be found no chief to offer us shelter, but a message from Bou Hafs had directed the headman to find us a hut in which to sleep; after bidding us welcome to his village, therefore, this official informed us that he had selected a couple of apartments either of which we could occupy upon payment of a very small "rent" to its owner and, he stated, we should experience no difficulty in securing the services of a

Shawia woman to cook for us such simple meals as we could expect in so remote a hamlet.

Sending Belayed with the mules by a circuitous route through the tributary ravine, the only track by which beasts can approach the village from the river, we followed the headman slowly up a path resembling a flight of rough hewn steps up the very knife-edge of the rocky angle upon the summit of which the village lies and at last, entering a narrow tunnel in the rock, we scrambled upward to emerge into the sunlight upon a rocky platform in the hamlet of Ouled Mansour itself.

We proceeded immediately to the selection of a temporary home and, having declined the offer of one house on account of a filthy condition to which our, by this time considerable, experience of life in native hovels could scarcely reconcile us, we decided upon a single apartment which, though occupied by its owner's family up to the moment of our arrival, was clean by comparison with some lodgings we had endured in the mountains.

Forbidding any attempt to sweep out the house, a proceeding which, advantageous if thoroughly carried out, only serves to disturb and enrage the unseen though by no means unnoticeable inhabitants of the place to the detriment of the traveller's repose if performed in the usual half-hearted native fashion, we caused some freshly pulled halfa grass to be placed upon the floor beneath our blankets and installed ourselves as best we could in our dingy and restricted surroundings. A small room, situated above a similar one which was entered by a door upon a lower level in the village street than our own, our new home was typical of all the poorer Shawia dwellings of the Aurès.

Built of untrimmed stones, like the huts of Tijdad,

our house was filled to overflowing with the usual medley of articles to be found in a Shawia hut, and it was so dark that only after we had opened another small door in the wall opposite to the entrance, could we obtain sufficient light to take stock of our new surroundings.

The opening of this door gave us a surprise for, having approached the house by means of a narrow tortuous lane between similar buildings, we had not realized exactly its position in the village; I withdrew my head somewhat quickly, therefore, when, having peered through the newly open door, I discovered that it led out to a very narrow and insecure looking platform of sticks beyond and beneath which was—space. The house, indeed, like all its neighbours on the outer sides of the village, was built upon the very brink of the precipice upon which Ouled Mansour is situated; in this case, upon the cliff overlooking the tributary ravine to which I have referred, its outer wall rising so straight from the edge of the rock as to be quite indistinguishable from it when seen from a distance, the balcony, intended as a small platform for the drying of fruit and provided with no rail or other protection for those who might care to trust their weight upon it, overhanging the abyss beneath.

Although not normally addicted to sleep-walking, we at once made a mental note of the necessity of keeping that door shut at night, however stuffy our small apartment might become!

The house we were to live in, then, was primitive enough to promise great opportunities in the village for the study of Shawia life undisturbed by the progress of modern civilization, a promise amply fulfilled when we explored the hamlet and became acquainted with its inhabitants. The outer dwellings of Ouled Mansour

are built, as we have seen, flush with the edges of the cliffs, the apex of the angle formed by the junction of the tributary ravine with the main valley being occupied by the "guelaa" tenanted by many families in addition to providing store room for the crops, its narrow lanes often mere tunnels beneath one or more stories of apartments built over them for the purpose of economy of space.

This "guelaa," approached by a narrow flight of steps culminating in a tunnel or shaft up the angle of rock from the main Rassira valley, can be entered by but one gateway upon the "land" side, so that it must have formed a splendid position for defence in the old days of turmoil and strife. Nowadays, however, presumably since the French have introduced order into the land, a number of houses, including our own, have been erected outside the "guelaa" but adjacent to it, while a few scattered dwellings are to be found among the gardens in the valley beneath, some occupied all the year round, others intended only to accommodate their owners in the seasons when their crops of dates, fruit or corn require to be protected from the nocturnal attentions of thieves.

Just outside the gate of the "guelaa" a flat rocky platform, commanding a magnificent view up the great Rassira cañon, affords a place of meeting to the village council, or "djemaa," and provides a convenient spot in which the male inhabitants of the hamlet can indulge in their favourite occupation of dozing idly in the sun after such labour as they undertake in the cultivation of the narrow strip of useful soil beside the river at the bottom of the gorge.

But, if the men can find ample time for dozing or sleepy contemplation of the remarkable landscape overlooked

from Ouled Mansour, their women folk are scarcely so fortunate. Every drop of water used in the village has to be carried in goatskins up the long steep track and through the tunnel from the bed of the stream below, the women and girls staggering beneath its weight as they toil, morning and evening, at this necessary but literally heavy task; indeed the traveller may well expect to find at Ouled Mansour a state of filth such as he encountered at Djemora though, in fact, the people of Ouled Mansour are clean by comparison with the Ouled Ziane, plentifully supplied though the latter are with warm water from a natural spring at a stone's throw from their doors.

Thus the women of the nest-like villages among the Rassira crags have a severe task to perform before they commence their day's work and another towards its close; the rest of the hours of daylight being spent in the usual occupations of spinning, weaving, pottery making, dyeing, dressing skins for bottles, the washing of clothes at the brook, cooking and grinding the corn for kuskus with the aid of a twin-stone quern. This latter occupation they commence at an unholy hour of the morning, as we have good reason to know, for the activities in this respect of the family occupying the room beneath us quite precluded any chance of sleep after the first streak of dawn, and often caused us to wish that we could have chosen for our visit to Ouled Mansour a period in which the sound of the grinding was low.

Our arrival in the village, I am afraid, rather interrupted the routine of household duties of the Shawia women and girls. It was very noticeable, from the moment we first set out to explore the village, that my wife aroused an unusual amount of interest among its female inhabitants, who came scuttling out of their houses to stare at her, and even struggled in their efforts to obtain



a closer view; indeed, so pressing did their attentions become that I inquired the reason of them, learning that, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant (who claimed to recall quite clearly incidents of the arrival of the French in Algeria some eighty or ninety years ago!), no European woman had set foot in Ouled Mansour and the neighbouring hamlets, so that the local Shawia women, who never leave their mountain homes, had not previously seen a "Roumiya," or female Roman, though most of the grown-up men had had opportunities of seeing them during periodical visits to a town.

The ladies of Ouled Mansour, therefore, never tired of inviting my wife into their houses or to join them in their outdoor pursuits, invitations which were gladly accepted owing to the opportunities they offered of observing domestic life in the hills, but which resulted in the consumption of too many meals for the personal comfort of the visitor. Of course, the absence from her person and attire of masses of jewellery struck the Shawia as very remarkable, only a fictitious description of the quantity of earrings, anklets, etc., she usually wore in England, left for safe keeping at home, convincing them that she was not cursed with the meanest of husbands, indeed I am not infrequently taken seriously to task by Shawia women with regard to my wife's lack of ornaments, attacks which I usually parry by endeavouring to buy those worn by my critic, upon which the subject is invariably changed at once.

The men of the village were just as delighted to show us around their native place as were the women to entertain and examine my wife, so that we were able to explore every inch of the village under the guidance of various newly made friends who were careful that we should miss nothing which they considered to be of interest,

showing us upon more than one occasion a spur of rock projecting over the valley hundreds of feet below from which a woman had fallen to her death in the course of the previous year.

It is remarkable how few of the sure-footed Shawia, to whom the dizziness produced by heights appears to be quite unknown, are killed as a result of falls from their villages into the depths beneath, and it is also noteworthy that the majority of those who do so fall are women, a fact which might seem to suggest that simpler means even than the divorce, so very easily obtained under Mohammedan law, have been discovered by husbands of the Aurès who may wish to rid themselves of wives whom the old age which overtakes them in early middle life has rendered unattractive and so no longer to be desired.

The population of the hamlets of the Rassira valley is very nearly self-supporting, the great majority of its simple requirements being manufactured in the villages themselves, the few articles in daily use which cannot be so supplied, for example the cotton stuffs used for the shirts and turbans of the men and the dress material of the women, soap, antimony, tobacco, matches and similar odds and ends, being purchasable at the tiny native shops to be found in every settlement or from Kabyle pedlars, enterprising traders from the Berber tribes of the hills near the coast, who wander over the Aurès, their wares carried upon the backs of sturdy little donkeys, spreading as they go some items of news from the outside world among the Shawia, the only news, other than that brought back by some native who may wander to Biskra in the desert or Batna to the north of the Aurès, which reaches the dwellers in the remote fastnesses of the hills.

In the course of our stay at Ouled Mansour we became acquainted with a number of interesting natives.

Among them we discovered a veritable mine of information in the person of an elderly man who combined the trade of a leather worker with the more scholarly vocation of a scribe, so that, in the former capacity, he turned an honest penny by the manufacture of neat little red leather cases to contain the written charms from which he derived a perhaps less irreproachable income in the latter.

Now a remote village such as Ouled Mansour, as out of touch with the desert and the great towns as any settlement of the Aurès, offers an excellent field of research to anyone desirous of studying Shawia superstitions and other folk-lore; we accordingly passed many an hour in the tiny workshop of our friend the scribe, seated upon a mat and consuming cup after cup of coffee as the old man, encouraged by our evident interest and apparent credulity, described in ever-increasing detail some of the mysteries of his magic art. The great majority of Algerian magical rites and the various charms worn by men, women and children, as well as by certain domestic animals both in the desert and the hills, are designed to defeat the machinations of some "jinn," or demon, to the native's belief in which I have several times alluded in the course of these pages, especially when describing the cause and effect of the "evil-eye" and the protective measures taken against it in the wearing of certain silver ornaments, among them the "hand," such as are made by the jewellers of Menaa, and to which I shall have to refer again when dealing in a later chapter with the main object of my researches in the hills, the healing art of modern native doctors.

These "jenoun," the plural of the word "jinn," would

be an intolerable curse to the existence of the superstitious dwellers in the desert and the hills were it not for the numerous charms which they believe to be efficacious in dealing with them, for, although some of them are considered to be harmless, the great majority appear to devote their whole existence to working mischief in the affairs of man. Writers of charms to be worn around the neck, therefore, like the marabouts we have already discussed and scribes such as our leather worker of Ouled Mansour, are daily in request to provide protective amulets for those who go in dread of supernatural attacks.

The millions of "jenoun" which infest this earth choose such varied places as rivers, manure heaps, empty houses or pools of blood as their abode; indeed it was ludicrous upon one occasion, when I severely cut my thumb, to notice the concern of the owner of the house I was in as he saw the blood spurt upon the floor, where he covered it with dust as quickly as it fell lest it should attract some demon into his home.

These unpleasant enemies of mankind are invisible as a rule, but are capable of assuming the guise of animals, human beings, or, indeed, of anything when engaged upon their nefarious practices but, in the opinion of most natives I have met with, they cannot readily be destroyed by earthly weapons.

In the opinion of those who write charms for a fee, the only really effective amulet for protection against "jenoun" consists in the slip of paper covered with scrawling Arabic characters and often including some mystic diagrams in the shape of triangles or squares which, encased in leather or cotton material for a man or in a neat rectangular silver box for the use of a woman, is to be found suspended from a cord around the neck or from a brooch upon the person of every native in Algeria

whom a venter of civilization has not led to despise his old beliefs. The writing on the paper is popularly supposed by tourists to consist of a verse or verses from the Koran, indeed many an Arab or Shawia will assure the traveller in all good faith that this is the case but, as a matter of fact, it is by no means true.

Most of the amulets contain words from the writings of some early mediæval author of books upon magical subjects, and bear no resemblance to texts from the Koran of the Arabian prophet, but it must be remembered that the vast majority of Algerian natives are unable to read the Koran or anything else, so that they are very ready to attribute any mystic or semi-sacred writings to Mohammed himself, into whose mouth have been forced many sayings, invented long after his death, to which in all probability he would never have given utterance.

Some scribes, indeed, attribute the origin of written charms to a supposed incident in the life of Mohammed.

One night, while wandering in meditation in the desert of Arabia, the prophet became aware of the presence of a very large, ugly and generally fearsome looking dame, who informed him that she was known as the "Mother of the Night" and that, assisted by the whole body of "jenoun," of whom she claimed to be the sovereign, she was in the habit of spreading ruin and death among mortals and destroying the possessions of the dwellers upon earth. Upon hearing this startling announcement the prophet, not unnaturally perhaps, invoked the aid of Allah, at the mention of whose name the chieftainess of the demons displayed signs of fear and promised protection to Mohammed and his followers who, however, she said must wear some written words to act as a passport by means of which her unseen minions could recognize them and so allow them to go their ways unhin-

dered and unharmed. Such is the origin, as given to me by certain scribes, of the wearing of written amulets in Algeria.

Many scribes, as well as marabouts, in addition to the writing of charms make a considerable addition to their incomes by foretelling the future to those who are about to undertake some enterprise or journey, sometimes with an accuracy which is really remarkable. An instance of this occurred to us at Ouled Mansour.

In order to make clear to my readers the knowledge, or rather lack of knowledge, in the light of which the prophecy was made, I should observe that Ouled Mansour is so remote and of so small consequence in the affairs of the outside world as to be quite beyond reach of foreign propaganda or intrigue and that, in the opinion of the scribe, England was situated somewhere in Cairo, for he had apparently never heard of the little island in the North Sea whose sons, with those of France, were so soon to stand between him and the yoke of Teuton rule.

On March 6, 1914, my wife and I asked the old man to foretell our future. After putting one or two questions to us as to our parents' names, the days of the week on which we were born, etc., he proceeded to consult a book, a cheap reprint obtained from Tunis of an old magical work, and finally announced that before the year was out I should be serving my "sultan" and that my wife should have a son.

In six months I held a commission in the Army (in which I had had no previous service), and on December 21, 1914, our son was born! Coincidence, no doubt; but these are the cold hard facts.

The practice of foretelling the future is by no means confined to the scribes and marabouts, for sorceresses

or "wise women," such as the hag whom we have mentioned in an earlier chapter as being capable of bringing down the moon, are to be found all over the hills quite prepared to forecast the issue of events upon receipt of a small fee. This they perform in various ways, the most usual method at Ouled Mansour and some other villages of the Aurès being as follows. The sorceress places a large flat wooden dish bottom upwards upon the ground and draws across the bottom of it, so that they intersect at right angles in the centre, two lines, one white, having been made with chalk, and the other black, of soot.

She then hangs a necklet of beads upon the hook of a spindle-whorl, to the other end of which is tied a small piece of string. Placing the necklet in the centre of the dish at the point of intersection of the two lines, she gently raises the spindle-whorl by means of the string, at the same time asking the question to which an answer is desired, until the necklet is lifted from the dish and can swing to and fro above it.

Should it sway along the white line a favourable or affirmative answer is held to have been given, while movement along the black line indicates an unfavourable or negative reply.

Very obviously the sorceress can control the motions of the necklet and thus return what answer she chooses to her client but the native is incredibly stupid in his superstitious beliefs and seems quite unable to detect the possibility of fraud.

Not only do the sorceresses of the Aurès practise divination of the course of future events, and, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, provide magical philtres to enable wives to retain the waning affections of their husbands, but they are also ready to set evil influences to work to

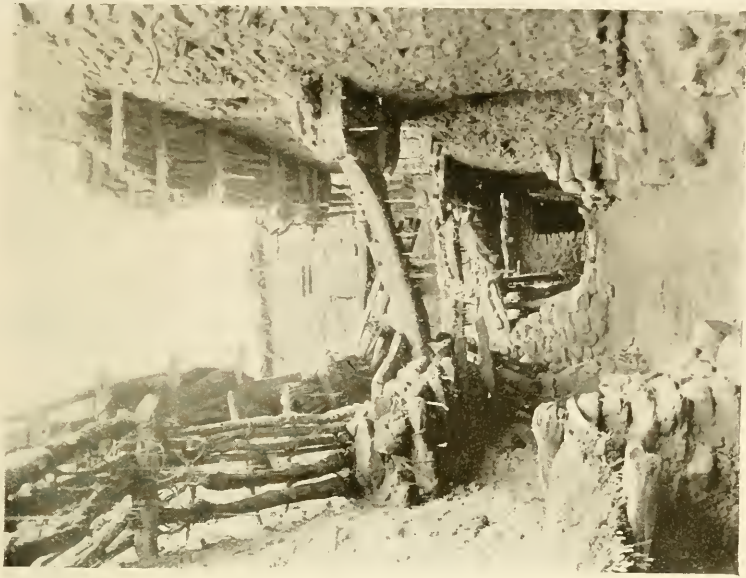
injure those who are unlucky enough to incur their wrath or whose personal enemies enlist the help of a magician to wreak vengeance upon them.

For example, a woman who has failed to secure the affections of some man upon whom she has cast an amorous eye will, with the aid of a sorceress, take the fresh liver of a goat or sheep and, having inserted a number of pins or thorns in it, hang it up in some secret place, such as a chimney in the victim's house, in the belief that as it dries and shrivels up so will the object of her jealous anger gradually waste away and die, a practice which finds many a parallel in the customs of primitive peoples in widely separated parts of the earth and which must be a survival of the magic of ages long since gone by, before the faith of Islam had spread over the Barbary States. The victim of these machinations, as soon as failing health warns him that some secret spell has been cast upon him, betakes himself to a scribe who will pretend to diagnose his case and prepare for him amulets the wearing of which is intended to counteract the evil influences which have been set to work, the resulting magical duel between the scribe and the unknown caster of the spell terminating, of course, according to the real nature of the complaint from which the victim happens by chance to be suffering, although, no doubt, persons who have reason to believe that they are being magically assailed may often work themselves into a state of nervous depression from which their blind faith in their amulets may well bring real relief. A great part of the trade, for so it may accurately be described, of the sorceresses of the Aurès consists in the preparation of charms usually supplied to women and children, for the menfolk more often place their trust in the scribes who, as we have seen, consider written amulets





FORETELLING THE FUTURE.



INTERIOR OF A "GUELAA,"



to be the only reliable means of defeating the machinations of "jenoun."

But the semi-human character of these demons renders them susceptible to influence by such an enormous number of various charms that the sorceresses are well able to thrive upon the credulity of their clients.

A mere list of even a small proportion of the substances used in magic with which we have come into contact in such remote hamlets as Ouled Mansour would occupy considerable space and would involve much technical discussion, out of place in any but a strictly ethnographical work, I will therefore describe in some detail the uses of a few of the commonest among them.

We have already noted in describing the magical uses of jewellery that "jenoun" are liable to fear, the wearing, therefore, of a charm which suggests the presence of some savage or dangerous creature is considered to be very efficacious against them, so that dogs' teeth, the heads of vipers, or the whole bodies of scorpions enclosed in a reed are commonly to be found in use for this purpose, as are models of weapons, old bullets, or packets of gunpowder which threaten the "jenoun" with the death to which they can succumb, and demons are supposed, for some reason which at present seems obscure, to dread iron or anything made of it, a fact which accounts for the wearing, especially by children, of any scrap of iron they can lay hands on, very frequently an old European key, suspended by a string from their necks, a practice which the traveller will notice at once in any village of the desert or the hills should he keep his eye open for trivial signs of native superstitions and beliefs.

Substances with a powerful or unpleasant smell, such as asafœtida, or a strong taste, such as red pepper, are considered to be useful in keeping away "jenoun" if

worn in little packets of rag attached to the costume, while a vast selection of dried plants, one of the commonest of which is rue, can be similarly employed owing to the demons' supposed aversion to them.

With all this medley of charms to choose from, a Shawia mother takes no risks in the precautionary measures she adopts for her son and, to a less extent, for her daughter; obtaining one magical substance from one sorceress and another from another and amulets from various scribes, she attaches these objects to a string worn as a bandolier over one shoulder beneath his cloak by her little boy, some of these strings containing upwards of a dozen charms to combat the attacks of demons and the ravages of disease or to ensure for the infant success in whatever career may lie before him.

Magic, then, plays a most important part in the daily lives of the Shawia and their nomad neighbours of the great desert and, even in the great centres of modern civilization, its hold upon the natives has by no means ceased to exist as a result of contact with the European and his ways; it is, however, a subject which is notoriously difficult to study.

Firstly, the natives are extremely reticent about their superstitions until the traveller has gained their confidence, itself a difficult task; and, secondly, although they know well the uses of their various charms, very few of them are able to offer any reason for their employment which would afford the student some clue to their origin or insight into the principles underlying their use, a fact which is scarcely to be wondered at if we consider for a moment how many of our English friends, who will not walk under a ladder, could explain the reason of their reluctance to do so, the custom persisting long after its origin has been generally forgotten.

Life at Ouled Mansour, in the very heart of the land of the Shawia, proved interesting enough, and the days passed quickly for us, busy as we were, from morning until night, investigating the customs of its inhabitants, an occupation by the way, which must not be indulged in too obviously for fear of arousing the suspicions of the people, who cannot be expected to understand the real object of the wanderer's inquiries, and are accordingly apt to regard the inquisitive observer as a spy who may report their various little infractions of the letter of the French law to authorities who, in the normal course of events, know well the wisdom of occasionally shutting their eyes.

Residing in the cottage we had hired, and partaking of stews of chicken or goat prepared for us by a Shawia woman, whose services as cook we had enlisted, supplemented by a few European stores we had brought with us, we were by no means so uncomfortable as our first glance at our surroundings had led us to anticipate that we should be, but, nevertheless, a stay in such a hamlet is not to be recommended to any one unprepared to dispense with all the creature comforts he can enjoy at an inn and to take life in the hills as he finds it.

Although the climate of the Rassira valley is delightfully sunny and dry, the elevated position of the villages upon the brink of its mighty cliffs renders warm clothing a necessity even so late in the year as March, for sometimes the north wind blows keenly from the snow-clad peaks of the higher Aurès and the nights are often remarkably cold, though, should the wanderer chance to be lodged in a hut among the date groves which fringe the stream at the bottom of the great ravine sheltered from the mountain winds, he would probably find the temperature several degrees higher than in the lofty villages themselves.

Indeed, warm clothing and a good supply of blankets

are always necessary in the Aurès since fires, except perhaps a few glowing embers in an earthen bowl, can rarely be indulged in Shawia houses for, in the absence of any fireplace, other than three stones upon which to stand the stew-pot beneath a minute opening in the roof, the building soon becomes filled with the heavy smoke of burning juniper which, pleasant enough to the nostrils when smelled from afar, would soon make the place unbearable to a European.

We were able at Ouled Mansour to collect a fair number of objects for the museum at Oxford, some of which we had not noticed in other parts of the hills, such as a type of powder-flask which provides one of the few examples of wood-carving of any merit whatsoever that we have met with in our rambles in the mountains, for decorative art, other than the ornamentation of rugs, mats, and cushions, the barbaric patterns of the Shawia silver trinkets and the very rudimentary designs upon some of their pottery, is conspicuous by its absence in the homes of the ancient Berber race upon the edge of the desert, though their Kabyle cousins of the north display a rather more artistic spirit in this respect.

A comparative study of the patterns used in art in the hills, when a sufficient number of them are available for the purpose, should prove extremely interesting, for those of the silver ornaments appear, at first glance, to bear no relation to the patterns on the rugs and cushions which latter differ from the designs displayed upon the powder flasks, while the more primitive ornamentation of the pottery seems to fall into a different category to all three.

No doubt this is attributable to the different periods at which the designs have crept into the Aurès from without, but a systematic examination of many patterns

must be undertaken before any opinion of value can be hazarded as to when these periods were and whence the decorative art of the Shawia in its various stages has originated.

The usual arts and crafts of the Aurès, the spinning, weaving, pottery making and other occupations, such as we have noted in preceding chapters from other parts of the massif, are to be found carried on at Ouled Mansour in the same manner as in the villages of the Wed Abdi and those of the other valleys we have visited, and they can readily enough be studied owing to the friendly character of the native.

We found, therefore, that we had increased our acquaintance with many phases of Shawia life when the time arrived for us to leave the little hamlet overlooking the great Rassira cañon and turn our steps towards the higher lying valley of the Wed el Abiod to the north.

Scrambling through the shaft and down the precipitous rocky knife-edge by which we had first reached the village, we joined our mules beside the stream and, having gained the opposite lip of the cañon overhanging the date groves and the river, we rode slowly along the cliff edge enjoying magnificent views of the wide valley through which, as we have seen, the cañon runs, the great gorge itself lying at our feet as we wended our way towards the village of Ghoufi upon the opposite side of the cañon to that upon which stands the hamlet of Ouled Mansour. All the time numerous small settlements of the Shawia, built upon the very brink of the chasm, were in sight as we moved, their gardens and date groves forming a continuous belt of green beside the river some hundreds of feet below us, for the villages of the Rassira appear to be as numerous as those of the Wed Abdi though somewhat smaller in size.

After passing a small mosque, lying by itself in the open country beside the track and boasting no minaret from which the faithful could be called to prayer, we came upon a lonely terebinth tree believed by the natives to be possessed of "baraka" or holiness, its branches covered with the rags with which passers-by had adorned it in the hope that some of this holiness might safeguard them upon their journey, a typical example of the "marabout trees" to which we have alluded before, and, continuing our way, pulled up at Ghoufi to partake of a meal and wander round the village before riding on to Tifefel, our destination, to the north of the Rassira cañon.

Since our visit to the central valleys of the Aurès a bordj, similar to those at Djemora and Menaâ, has been erected by the French at Ghoufi to accommodate officials and those who care to wander through this part of the massif, so that the traveller can stay in comfort in the Rassira valley without being compelled to hire a native hut such as we had inhabited at Ouled Mansour, and he will find Ghoufi itself extremely interesting as a typical Berber settlement of the district.

Built like the neighbouring hamlets upon the edge of the ravine, its "guelaa" entered by but one gateway, consisting of a mass of tiny dwellings and store-houses for the protection of its crops, their upper floors reached as at Baniane by the most insecure looking ladders, bridges and balconies of untrimmed logs, the village will afford the traveller who stays at its "bordj" an excellent example of the villages of the Rassira and, no doubt, its natives will be found to be as primitive and as hospitable as their neighbours with whom we stayed; in addition to which its proximity to numerous other hamlets, which can readily be examined in the



course of a day's ramble, would seem to render Ghoufi a remarkably convenient centre from which to explore the country round so that, when a roadway suitable to cars runs down beside the edge of the great cañon from the northern part of the Aurès to the Sahara at Mechounech, it will probably become a halting-place for the tourist, and the Shawia women of the area will soon cease to gaze with wonder upon one of their European sisters, as they were so eager to do at the time of our visit to their country in the spring of 1914.

As we had moved up to Ghoufi from Ouled Mansour, the cañon had gradually decreased in depth so that, beautiful as were its glowing cliffs and its gardens, the deep green of which was now increasingly relieved by the admixture of numerous fruit trees in their spring dress of blossom, it was scarcely so impressive in its wild almost forbidding grandeur as at the village we had just left behind us, and, continuing our journey along its western edge, we found that this decrease in depth became more and more noticeable and the number of fruit trees greater and greater until, after we had descended into the bed of the stream itself and ridden some distance along its course in the water, the cañon became nothing more remarkable than a shallow though beautiful gorge, upon emerging from which we entered a wide basin at its northern end, through which the Rassira River meandered after passing through a narrow cleft in the mountains from the Wed el Abiod some miles to the north.

This, then, was the end of the great cañon of the Rassira beneath the shadow of the glowing rocks of the Red Cheeked mountain, a gorge more extraordinary in its grandeur and wild beauty throughout its fifteen miles of length than any ravine to be found in those parts

of the French North African dependencies with which I have become acquainted in my wanderings, and yet a district of which so few European visitors to Algeria have so much as heard the name ; a land in which the tourist is unknown.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE HEART OF THE AURÈS

THE UPPER RASSIRA BASIN—A CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN AFRICA AND EUROPE—AGRICULTURE IN THE AURÈS—CEREMONY AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF PLOUGHING—THE SHAWÍA PLOUGH—THRESHING—THE HARVEST FESTIVAL—SCALES—VENDETTAS—DYEING—THE GOVERNMENT STATION AT TKOUT—A "SUN-DIAL"—THE GORGE OF TIGHANIMINE—A MILITARY EPISODE—THE HAMLET OF TAGHOUT—OVER THE HEIGHTS TO TIMGAD.

WHEN we emerged from the Rassira cañon in our leisurely journey northward through the Aurès we had by no means reached the higher central portion of the massif, for the wide basin, to which I have referred, lying at the foot of an amphitheatre of rocky hills, had to be crossed before we could enter the one cleft in the sheer wall of the Djebel Zellatou, known as the gorge of Tighanimine, through which the stream of the Wed el Abiod, or White River, flows down from the valley which bears its name to become the Rassira River whose course we had ascended, which valley of the Wed el Abiod we must traverse for the greater part of its length before arriving at the snow-capped mountain Ichemoul, one of the highest peaks of the massif, whence we could proceed to the real highlands of the Aurès overlooking the plateau to the north. The journey from the Rassira gorge across the basin to the Wed el Abiod resembles in some degree the remarkable passage from Djemora to Menaa, the rapid transition from Africa to Europe which we noted in a previous chapter; for, leaving behind him typical

North African scenery and foliage as he emerges from the date groves of the mighty cañon, the traveller finds himself in the corn fields of the basin mentioned above, where a mixture of scattered palms and fruit trees causes the country to resemble a sort of hinterland between the Africa he has just left behind him and the southern European scenery, grey rocks and stunted evergreen trees, which he will discover to be characteristic of the valley of the Wed el Abiod so very few miles to the north.

In the midst of this basin—this connecting link, as it were, between the scenery of two continents—lies the little village of Tifelfel, our destination in our journey from Ouled Mansour, surrounded when we approached it by numerous fruit trees clothed in blossom and wide green fields of rising corn.

Dismounting at the residence of a sheikh, who administered the district under the great Kaïd Bou Hafs, a building situated amid a number of scattered huts a hundred yards or more from the massive “guelaa” of the village which, with the gleaming white minaret of a mosque, had been visible for some time as we neared the place, we were made very welcome by our new host and provided with a large apartment, a daïs at one end of which was to serve us as a sleeping place, while a European table and some chairs at the opposite end showed us that we were not to lack opportunity of eating and writing in a state of comparative comfort such as we had not enjoyed for some time past.

While the village of Tifelfel is by no means so picturesque in its construction and surrounding scenery as the nest-like hamlets upon the Rassira crags it, nevertheless, afforded us, during the days we stayed with its hospitable sheikh, an opportunity of seeing something of the methods of Shawia agriculture in the carefully tilled land around.



THE UPPER BASSIRA BASIN.

To face p. 100.



These methods may be taken as typical of those employed throughout the whole of the massif. In a land such as Algeria, in which superstition is so rife and so great importance is attached to mystic ceremony and rite, it is scarcely surprising that the ploughing of the soil to receive the seed, upon the fruitfulness of which the very life of the community depends, should be made the occasion of some magical formality, the object of which is to ensure a plenteous harvest such as may banish the ever threatening spectre of famine for a season from a country in which drought, and its attendant misery and want, all too frequently afflict the dwellers in its arid wastes and sun-scorched barren hills. When the season for ploughing approaches, a season naturally varying according to the district but which in the greater part of the area we are considering may be taken as October, the inhabitants of the Shawia village have to decide which member of the community shall first put his hand to the plough, for it is necessary that the first person to commence the work should be a member of some old, well-known and respected family who may be considered likely to bring luck to the operations of the community as a whole.

Such a person having been chosen, his family proceeds to prepare a toothsome dish of semolina, butter, honey and sugar, known in the Shawia dialect as "ademine," such as is usually offered to guests at wedding ceremonies both in the desert and the hills, and fills a bag with a number of assorted fruits, including a melon or pumpkin, and bread.

Upon the day appointed for the commencement of the work the iron "share" which is fitted to the primitive plough of the Aurès, is solemnly dipped in butter, after which the sacks of seed are placed upon a mule, the

plough and harness upon another, and the menfolk of the family start forth to their field, in very barren districts nothing but a patch of dry soil indistinguishable from the desert around it and marked out by no visible boundaries, though its position and proportions are equally well known to the natives.

The little party is followed by a female member of the family, attired in her very best garments and bedecked with all the glittering mass of silver ornaments she can lay her hands on, bearing with her the dish of "ademine" and the bag of fruits and bread.

Arrived at the field the mules are relieved of their burden and harnessed to the plough, after which the pumpkin or melon carried in the bag is solemnly transfixed upon the ploughshares, from which it is immediately removed again, "in order," as my Berber friends informed me, "that the harvest may be good."

This done, all members of the family present, and all passers-by who happen to be within call, partake of a spoonful of the sweet dish of "ademine," after which, preceded by a brief prayer to Allah for the blessing of a fruitful year, the work of ploughing and sowing is commenced. The gaily dressed woman of the party then returns home, carrying with her the dish of "ademine," of which she offers a spoonful to any one whom she may meet upon the way.

Such in brief is the ceremony which marks the commencement of ploughing in the hills.

The plough itself, a primitive locally made implement, will be found on examination to be very little advanced from the adze-like hoe from which it has been evolved, for it consists merely of a forked branch of a tree to the lower, and shorter, arm of which the share is socketed,



mules harnessed to the end of the longer arm drawing the implement which is steered by means of a flimsy vertical handle at the junction of the two arms.

At the time of the harvest the young and old of both sexes in the mountains turn out to reap and carry.

The corn, cut by means of small sickle hooks of native make, is conveyed from the field to the threshing-floor in nets slung across the backs of mules if the intervening distance be considerable, or by that scarcely less enduring beast of burden, woman, if the way be short, the willing carrier of the season's crop uttering the while the long-drawn quivering cry which we have already found to be so freely uttered as a sign of rejoicing by the women at weddings in the hills.

Threshing is carried out by means of a line of mules which tread the corn beneath their feet as they wend their way round and round a vertical post set up in the centre of the threshing-floor; the floor itself consisting either of a level slab of natural rock or of an artificially prepared surface of trimmed or untrimmed stone.

The conclusion of the harvest is marked by a feast in the village to which the inhabitants subscribe according to their means, the natives partaking of kuskus and meat, and witnessing the usual ungraceful dances performed by unmarried girls or, in areas in which their services can be obtained, of professional dancers whose antics we have already described, the women of the community attending the festival attired in their best to greet with cries of joy the dancing of each performer as she moves to and fro to the strains of the oboe and the drum.

The fruits of the apricot trees, so common in the hills, are dried and preserved for use during the following unfruitful period of the year, being often consumed

cooked in stews of meat—a dish by no means to be despised if cleanly and carefully prepared—while in regions too high above sea-level, and so too cold for the cultivation of dates, the place of this staple food of the desert is taken to some extent by the produce of the very numerous fig trees to be found in the gardens of the higher villages of the hills, though the Shawia who cannot grow dates for themselves usually obtain a supply of them by purchase or by barter, travelling to the northern oases of the desert to exchange a given weight of some such garden produce as, let us say, turnips against an agreed quantity of dates. The scales used in these transactions are very primitive.

Two halfa-grass baskets of equal weight are suspended by cords one from each end of a straight bar of wood, itself suspended by a joint at its centre from a wooden handle so that, when the scales are held up by means of this handle, either basket can dip down as weight is thrown into it, the Arab date owner and the itinerant Berber purveyor of turnips, suspicious enough of each other as representative of more or less antagonistic races, watching one another meantime with eagle eye, as turnip by turnip or handful by handful the produce is placed upon the scales.

Among peoples of avaricious character, whose tempers are short and whose love of sharp practice over a bargain can be likened only to that of the proverbial "horse copper," it is not to be wondered at that these deals occasionally lead to disputes, in the course of which a knife, drawn in the heat of the argument, inflicts a fatal wound and so inaugurates one of those vendettas which modern law and order have not yet succeeded in suppressing in Algeria.

The village of Tifefel, its scattered huts lying in the

vicinity of its "guelaa," appears to be typical of the Shawía settlements of the neighbourhood, of which we visited a number during our stay with its hospitable sheikh.

The "guelaa" itself resembled those already described, but its outlying dwellings were curious for, built half embedded in little hillocks, we often found ourselves, when descending such a hillock, standing upon the roof of a house the existence of which we had not noticed, the dry mud covering its flat roof being exactly the same colour as the surrounding soil from which, indeed, it had been obtained.

The houses, too, not huddled together in the confined space of the surface of a rocky spur, were larger than those of the Rassira hamlets and frequently boasted a courtyard.

Such time as was not spent in wandering about the village and its fields we occupied in watching the sheikh's family at their daily tasks; for he, a Berber, allowed us free access to his home and the quarters of his women folk.

Upon one occasion we found them engaged in dyeing a pair of knitted woollen leggings, much worn by the mountaineers of many nations and made by the Shawía themselves.

A mixture of a certain earth, black goats' hair, butter, mutton fat and dripping was set on fire in a bowl, the smoke arising therefrom nearly suffocating us as we stood by, after which it was extinguished and, some water containing pomegranate skin having been mixed with it, it was set upon the hearth to boil, when the white woollen leggings were placed in it and boiled for a few minutes, after which they were removed, dyed black as soot, to be hung up to dry in the sun.

As I have already pointed out, imported dyes are very rapidly finding their way into the Aurès to the detriment of the native-made carpets, pillows etc., and to the destruction of an ancient Shawia art, but the ladies of the sheikh's household at Tifelfel preferred the use of the old-fashioned home-made article for the red, black, green or yellow colouring of their wool, dyes which, with the exception of the black, they obtained from local herbs, to the less laborious task of dyeing their wool, by means of imported European powders; my wife was able, therefore, to glean quite a fund of information relating to an art which is fast vanishing from even the remoter villages of the Aurès.

When we moved on from Tifelfel our destination was of a very different character from the squalid hamlets we had recently been examining, for we were to pay a visit to the government station of Tkout, a few miles to the north, in which a single European family, that of the Assistant Administrator who had met us at Mechounech, endured banishment from all the amenities of modern culture in the cause of law, order and civilization, leading a life of absolute isolation amid a people still in a state of barbarity which must have rendered the existence of a French family monotonous in the extreme.

Here, enjoying the boundless hospitality of our genial hosts, we soon began to realize that circumstances of which we had tried to make the best in the hills had been none too comfortable for us in the past months; but the fleas of Baniane, the cold and draughty nights spent upon the floor at Ouled Mansour, the hundred and one little inconveniences of mountain travel merely served to increase our enjoyment of the luxury which surrounded us in the defensible "bordj" of Tkout.

We attempted no serious study of native life during our stay at Tkout, partly because we were only too glad to enjoy a brief period of rest in the society of our European friends and partly, too, because I do not consider a centre of the French Administration, however small, to be a suitable spot in which to carry on researches into the manners and customs of the Arab or Shawia. The secretive side of the native's character becomes very much accentuated when he is afraid that tales of his habits may be carried to and fro, and many of his customs cannot be expected to find favour with the officers who rule over him; it is hopeless, therefore, for the traveller to endeavour to obtain reliable information while living as the guest of an official. In addition to this a detachment of cavalry, recruited from all over the country, which had recently been removed from the "bordj" had doubtless left its mark upon the customs of the natives of Tkout who, from our point of view, could scarcely be considered fair specimens of the Berber race to which in reality they belong. One interesting custom we noted, however, during our stay at the "bordj," namely a system of measuring time.

It has scarcely been necessary to state that the more or less fertile basin in which Tifefel and Tkout are situated owes its fertility to the same system of irrigation which is to be found all over the Aurès, namely the canal or "seggia" system formed by placing barrages in the stream which flows through the district, a system employed in the days of the Roman empire.

We have noted at Beni Ferah that the flow of water into the various "seggias" is regulated by means of a "water clock," or sinking bowl, but at Tkout another method obtains of apportioning to the various "seggias" the hours of water supply to which each is entitled.

A post set up in a little open space in the village is carefully watched over by a native specially appointed for the purpose who, as the shadow of this post, beneath an almost always cloudless sky, moves slowly round from one known point to another upon a neighbouring building or rock, cries out to those who are waiting to stem the flow of water into one "seggia" and turn it into the next when the shadow indicates that the moment has arrived for the stream to be deflected.

This very primitive sun-dial appears to satisfy the native's requirements as completely as the "water clock" we have already described.

The Kaïd, Bou Hafs, was absent during our stay at Tkout, but we visited his house in the company of the Administrator and were received there by his son.

The house itself, the residence of so progressive a chief, contained rooms furnished in a European fashion for the reception of honoured guests and equipped with every regard to luxury which had occurred to its wealthy owner, while upon its walls were displayed some of the finest specimens of native firearms I have ever seen, their barrels a mass of silver inlay and their stocks encrusted with ivory, coral, and mother o' pearl.

Bou Hafs' son invited us to a meal which, it was decided, should take the form of a farewell lunch to be given near the gorge of Tighanimine upon the day of our departure for the north.

When that day arrived, therefore, the day upon which we were to exchange the comforts of Tkout for the squalor of the hamlets of the Wed el Abiod, we rode out from the "bordj" accompanied by the Administrator, his wife, and one of his two small daughters, escorted by three or four mounted orderlies, in their uniform burnouses of blue trimmed with scarlet braid, and, after

retracing our steps nearly half-way to Tifelfel, turned westwards to meet our host at the southern entrance to the cleft in the great rocky wall of Zellatou, through which, as we have seen, the White River flows from the upper Aurès to become the Rassira where it enters the great cañon to the south.

Here we found a most sumptuous repast prepared for us by a small army of the Kaïd's followers.

Tents had been pitched, a "mechwi" was being slowly turned upon its spit, and every indication was apparent that a royal send-off into the mountains was to fall to our lot.

Such, indeed, turned out to be the case, so that it was after a very sumptuous banquet indeed that we turned our steps towards the gorge in which our hosts were to leave us to pursue our journey to the hamlet at which we were to continue our work among the natives.

The gorge of Tighanimine, deeper and more forbidding in appearance than that of El Kantara, may in some respects be compared to the latter in that it forms a gateway between the European scenery of the higher Aurès valleys and the African country of the Rassira cañon, though the impression of a sudden passage from one continent to another is scarcely so vivid as at the "Mouth of the Desert," owing to the existence of the hinterland formed by the fertile basin around Tkout and Tifelfel. The rugged and precipitous rocks of Tighanimine are grey rather than ruddy in appearance, suggestive of the hillsides which lie immediately to the north of them, so that, grand though it undoubtedly is, the short defile between Tkout and the Wed el Abiod can scarcely be held to rank with El Kantara in the splendours of its scenery nor with the great cañon of

the Rassira whose wild magnificence we have, albeit feebly, attempted to describe. But there is an interesting story told about the gorge of Tighanimine which may well be repeated here.

In the early days of the French occupation of Algeria, to be exact, I think, in the summer of 1850, a column of French troops was carrying out a series of marches through the heart of the Aurès with a view, presumably, to showing its then turbulent inhabitants that Pax Gallica was not unsupported by might; which might, as a matter of fact, has been frequently challenged at one time or another by the warlike descendants of those Berbers who stemmed the tide of the Arab invasion some twelve hundred years ago. In the course of one of these marches the column came upon the gorge by way of the Wed el Abiod, the first French troops to reach the almost impassable defile.

In those days the track, passable to wheeled traffic when we saw it and soon, I suppose, to be converted into a highroad, by which we passed northward overlooking the right bank of the stream, did not exist, the only passage through the gorge consisting of the narrowest of ways, so encumbered by boulders as to be practically impassable by the laden mules which carried the impedimenta of the troops.

The Frenchmen, therefore, set to work to clear the way, and laboriously struggled through the chasm beneath its frowning cliffs to the open country beyond, improving the track as they progressed.

Regarding themselves as the first trained soldiers to work their way through the pass, considered at the time to be one of the most inaccessible in all the rugged valleys of the Aurès massif, the units engaged were somewhat naturally proud of their achievement and



requested the officer commanding the force to allow them to commemorate it by carving the names of their regiments and the date upon some suitable rock in the valley.

To this he readily assented, and a search was made for a rock flat enough to take the inscription.

Such a boulder at once arrested their attention, ideally placed for their purpose and flat as if trimmed to receive their chisels.

Climbing up to this well-chosen rock the soldiers began to clean it, preparatory to immortalizing their exploit by means of graven stone. The rock, however, upon closer examination did not present so smooth a surface as had been imagined, and a preliminary rubbing revealed the fact that human hands had worked upon it in the past.

Judge of the amazement of the soldiers of France when some one among them, accustomed to the deciphering of inscriptions, announced that the rock already bore the name of a unit of a great disciplined army, an army whose traditions had been as glorious as their own, for the time-worn letters discovered upon the stone informed the column that the gorge of Tighanimine had been traversed and a track laid through it by the Sixth Legion of the Roman Army in the reign of Antoninus Pius more than sixteen centuries before!

The French, naturally, left the honour of the passage to those to whom it was justly due, and the rock with its simple announcement of a military achievement, greater in the days of equality of arms between the disciplined soldier and his determined Berber foe than any such exploit can be in modern times, still reminds the traveller through the gorge of the days when Rome held sway over Numidia, when her cohorts stationed at

Lambèse to the north of the Aurès were called upon to hold in check the warlike activities of the forefathers of the Shawia in the hills.

Taking leave of our kindly French hosts and the Kaïd's son beneath the shadow of the towering cliffs of Tighanimine, we continued our way through the defile to emerge into the valley of the White River and halt a few miles higher up at a tiny hamlet upon the slope overlooking the right or north-western bank of the stream.

Here we were received by the local headman, for Taghout, with its score and a half of tiny huts, was not important enough to require the residence of a sheikh, and we found that a very small and dark room, containing a platform of sticks covered with a mat upon which to spread our blankets, had been placed at our disposal.

Softened, no doubt, by the luxury of a European's home at Tkout, we passed a more or less uncomfortable night wakefully listening to the animated conversations, carried on by very powerful voices, in the houses round which went on far into the night and commenced again even before the first streak of dawn in the morning, the few hours in which the human voices were still being disturbed by the short sharp barking of the native dogs.

We had arrived at Taghout after dark; it was only next morning, therefore, that we learned the reason of the loud-voiced discussions which had disturbed our night's repose.

Cafés, those crowded clubs of the larger villages in which the male population spends so much of its time and money, are conspicuous by their absence at Taghout and the nights, even in spring-time, are far too cold at this altitude to encourage the gossips of the place to foregather at the draughty corners of its narrow lanes,



THE DEFILE OF TIGHANIMINE.



TAGHOUT.



the people, therefore, simply retire to their own houses and carry on their conversations from them, for the hamlet is so small that the human voice, if the strident tones of an excited Shawia may be called human, can easily be heard from one end of it to another.

Thus, just as the tired wanderer rolls himself in his blankets and closes his eyes in the hope of a refreshing sleep he will be started to wakefulness by a shout of "Oh, Ali ben Mohammed!" from the next-door apartment, answered, a moment later, by "Here am I; Oh, Salah!" from the opposite end of the village, a prelude to conversation lasting an hour or more which, loud as it must necessarily be in any case, will soon cause him to marvel at the wondrous capacity of the human lungs should the discussion develop into a dispute.

The houses at Taghout were such as might be expected in so small a hamlet, mere hovels of grey stone resembling the dwellings of Tijdad and similar villages of the higher districts of the Aurès, but in all of them we were hospitably received and pressed to partake of the usual honey and walnuts which are always offered to a guest in the poorest households of the hills.

In olden days the site of the village had lain higher up the slopes of the north-western wall of the Wed el Abiod but, in the troublous times before the arrival of the French, it had been destroyed in the course of a conflict between some Arabs from the south and the Ouled Daoud Shawia tribe, which inhabits the district, and had been re-erected lower down a quarter of a mile or so from the bank of the oleander-bordered stream beside which the inhabitants of Taghout cultivate their tiny fields of corn, their apricots, walnuts and their figs.

The grey rocky valley in which the village lies, its

sides dotted with the stunted juniper trees which we have found to be the characteristic of the valleys farther to the west, can scarcely be considered beautiful, especially when visited after a stay in the Rassira cañon, and northerly winds sweeping down it from the snow-capped mountain, Ichemoul, which stands at its head, render the district unpleasantly cold, especially at night, even when spring is well advanced, but the valley and its villages are interesting in that they afford opportunities of studying the Berber people as much uninfluenced by the outside world as in any part of the Aurès.

We found plenty of occupation, therefore, during our stay at Taghout of becoming further acquainted with Shawia crafts and customs, an examination of which we had commenced elsewhere, and many of which I have already described, so that it was with no regret at having endured for a spell its unavoidable discomforts that we eventually continued our journey up the Wed el Abiod towards the northern plateau, the railway and home. Wending our way up the vale of the White River, along a track which might well be described as a fairly good road even just before the war, we soon came upon the village of Arris, then a station of the White Fathers, the great missionaries of North Africa, followers of Cardinal Lavignerie whose statue at Biskra overlooks the desert in which he and his subordinates have worked so bravely and so hard, but now the headquarters of the administration of the Commune Mixte of the Aurès, an administrative area which may be taken to comprise the whole of the central portion of the massif from the northern plateau to the desert.

From Arris we continued our way up the Wed el Abiod to the point beneath the great mountain of Ichemoul at which it receives upon its right bank the waters of

the insignificant brook known as the Wed Basha, following the course of which the road led us to the small village of Basha in which we were to pass the night.

Here, as at Taghout, no chief existed who could offer us a lodging; we were obliged, therefore, to sleep in a disused store-room, the numerous cracks and crevices in which compelled us to light a fire, for the night was extremely cold, and to submit to the state of semi-suffocation which is the only alternative to freezing in the higher villages of the Aurès during a great part of the year. Next morning, after making a few small purchases for the museum at Oxford, we again took the road for an hour or so, before turning off to the north-west to follow a bridle-path to the village of Bou Hamar, situated in the valley of the Wed Taga on the northern slopes of the massif. As we gradually ascended the high ridge which forms the backbone of the Aurès overlooking the level plains to the north we encountered a bitterly cold wind and found much snow still lying around us, indeed we partook of our midday meal among deep snow-drifts in a spot sheltered from the wind in which the sun, already powerful, soon made us realize that a move of but a yard or two may make all the difference between spring and winter on the summits of the Algerian hills.

Having basked for an hour in the genial warmth of the sun we again faced the icy blast and surmounted the ridge, whence glorious views of the plateau unfolded themselves to our gaze, and commenced our descent of the northern slopes of the Aurès, passing through a rocky gorge in which it was necessary to ford the Wed Taga upon several occasions, and so eventually arriving at Bou Hamar situated in a comparatively fertile valley

from which we obtained many fine glimpses of snow-capped hills, now left behind us to the south.

At Bou Hamar our host, the sheikh, provided us with warm accommodation, for the place lies high, in a well-built room attached to his own house containing a fireplace, built upon the European plan with a sufficient outlet for its smoke, which enabled us to spend our evenings in comfort untempered with suffocation, a blessing for which we were duly thankful after some of our recent experiences in less pretentious dwellings. The sheikh, upon whose burnous the scarlet ribbon of the Legion of Honour recalled a very gallant action in the service of the French performed in years gone by, expressed every willingness to help us in our work, and used to spend much time discussing with us the various subjects we were attempting to study.

Not only this, but, being a man of very considerable learning in Islamic lore, he insisted upon entering into long discussions on comparative religion, which means that he was anxious to get my views upon the birth of our Lord in order, as I thought, to refute them by his own.

Now this placed me in a very awkward position, for if there is one subject which I have found, as a student of Mohammedan customs, it is wiser to avoid than to discuss, that subject is my own religion. Let the student and the Shawia agree to differ upon this subject and no ill feeling will result on either side, but a chance remark falling from even the most careful tongue in the course of such a discussion may well have the effect of putting an end to the traveller's researches over a wide extent of country.

At Bou Hamar, however, I found that the sheikh was merely questioning me with the object of advancing



his own knowledge of the religion of France, so that I was able to retire from the discussion on the score of ignorance of the Roman Catholic faith and so extricate myself from a somewhat difficult position, for our talks took place in the presence of other natives who might reasonably be expected to take hold of my words and use them to our disadvantage.

The village of Bou Hamar is similar to the hamlets of the Wed el Abiod, but larger and rather more scattered, and its houses are distinctly well built, though constructed upon the usual plan of dwellings in the northern parts of the Aurès, indeed its little minaretless mosque of modern construction is the best example I have seen of pure Shawia building for, as my readers will have observed, the Berbers of the hills are not famous for their architectural skill.

Leaving Bou Hamar after a few days spent in the revision of our notes and the addition to them of a certain amount of material not already obtained, we rode through a wooded country to descend into the plateau at the great Roman ruins of Timgad, one of the most remarkable sites to be visited in the whole of the ancient world, the fair city which was called into being by a vast military camp at Lambèse a few miles to the west whence, presumably, the soldiers of the Sixth Legion sallied forth to the passage of the gorge of Tighanimine.

Even to those who can boast of no knowledge of archæology and the history of Rome, these ruins, many acres in extent, with their theatre, their public buildings and baths, their lines of graceful columns and streets in the pavements of which are still to be found the ruts worn by the wheels of Roman chariots, must not only convey a very lasting impression, but provide food for reflection upon the state of the country in the

days when it enjoyed a greater rainfall than at present, before the destroyers from Arabia had laid their hands upon the land and the ordered peace of Rome had given place to the centuries of chaos and misrule which intervened before the French assumed responsibility for the reconstruction of Algeria; and, as he passes on by road to Batna, now the largest and most important European settlement of the plateau, the traveller may well be excused if he falls to comparing in his mind the luxury and splendour of the past, traces of which he has left behind him at Tingad, with the unlovely modern garrison town he is approaching.

At Batna our rambles through the central portion of the Aurès massif had come to an end.

Having wandered from the Saharan oasis of Mechounech to the Berber settlement of Baniane, to the wild remote villages of the Rassira cañon and the civilization of the government post at Tkout, we had passed to the upper valleys of the Aurès and to a road which, it is to be hoped, will some day be continued southward until the motorist may follow in the footsteps of our patient and sure-footed mules to explore for himself one of the most remarkable districts in Algeria.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE HEALING ART IN THE HILLS

THE MAIN OBJECT OF OUR JOURNEYS—THE HEALING ART PRACTISED SECRETLY IN THE AURÈS—WE ATTEMPT TO STUDY IT—OUR PATIENTS IN THE MOUNTAINS—UNEXPECTED MEETING WITH A NATIVE SURGEON—PRIMITIVE INSTRUMENTS—TREPANNING—FORTITUDE OF THE PATIENTS—A FRACTURED KNEE-CAP—"CUPPING" AND DENTISTRY—MEDICINE AMONG THE SHAWÍA—ORIGIN OF THE HEALING ART IN THE AURÈS—MEDICINE AND MEDICAL MAGIC.

**D**URING the whole of our wanderings in the western and central valleys of the Aurès, and to rather a less extent in our final journey up the region dominated by the heights of the Djebel Cherchar, we had in view a special object in addition to the general survey of life among the Shawíá which we were attempting to compile, an object which we were fortunate enough to attain, namely a study of the healing art which had been known for many years to be secretly practised in the mountains. This healing art has seemed to us so interesting, and the new light we have been lucky enough to throw upon it has revealed such remarkable facts connected with it, that I have thought some description of the surgery and medicine of the Aurès should find a place in the pages of a book in which an attempt is made to lay before the general reader an account of native life in the hills; and as our information on the subject was gleaned here and there, little by little, as we wandered over the country, I have considered it best to devote a brief chapter to

it instead of giving in the sequence in which they were obtained such notes as we collected in the various hamlets as we moved.

My readers who, in their imagination, have followed in our footsteps and have noted the numerous quaint superstitions and magical rites to which we have had so frequently to refer may well learn with surprise that medicine and surgery, worthy of any consideration at all, are to be found in such a land of sorceresses and magicians as the demon-haunted hills on the edge of the Sahara; they may reasonably suppose that, in case of illness or injury, the Shawia have recourse only to the use of charms or magical observances such as are, indeed, largely employed by these sorceresses and magicians, for even a fairly close acquaintance with the natives formed in their mountain homes will not reveal the fact that men trained in the healing art of the Middle Ages practise this art to-day in remote hamlets of the hills and in the tents of the desert nomads beneath them.

Many years ago, however, the existence of such practitioners became known to the French authorities, for persons bearing scars indicative of surgical operations were observed by officials in the neighbourhood of the Aurès, persons who could never have undergone such operations save in their own homes, and at the hands of native surgeons, one particular scar being observed with startling frequency, that left by the removal of bone from the skull, the scar of the trepan.

But although these scars were found almost daily, all efforts to investigate at all closely the methods of the Shawia surgeons proved more or less unavailing, for these men, suspicious enough by nature, became so secretive when their occupation became known to the authorities that they not only refused to discuss their

art but even pretended that it had ceased to exist in the hills; for, after French law had been established in Algeria, the man who performed an operation resulting in the death of his patient was, of course, liable to be held responsible for the death, with consequences very unpleasant to himself, if he were not in possession of the recognized French qualifications to carry on a doctor's work, qualifications to which none of the primitive Shawia could pretend. The doctor, then, became technically an outlaw and, in consequence, he considered it necessary to practise his art with the utmost secrecy and cunning, distrusting every attempt to pry into his concerns and regarding with jealousy and well simulated contempt the French medical officers attached to the various government stations, for he realized that if his patients became acquainted with modern European medicine and surgery his livelihood would be gone.

The Shawia surgeon, therefore, in addition to concealing his own methods, loses no opportunity of belittling those of European practitioners, whom he accuses of ignorance of all operations save the one to which the Mohammedan would rather die than submit, namely the amputation of a limb.

In the circumstances it is scarcely surprising that the traveller in the Aurès sees nothing of the work of the surgeons nor even learns of their existence in the course of a hurried journey, and that collections of the very primitive instruments with which they produce some really remarkable results have up to now been extremely rare in museums if, indeed, anything approaching a representative collection had ever been brought out of the hills before 1914.

It was, therefore, with scant hope of realizing our ambition that upon commencing our general work among

the Shawia we decided to endeavour to learn something of their surgery and to acquire such of their instruments as we could find.

Now I am not a doctor and, except for the little knowledge of medicine—sometimes a dangerous possession—which comes to those who spend much of their lives beyond the reach of skilled medical aid, I can claim no acquaintance with the healing art, nevertheless I decided that the most likely road to success in my search for native practitioners would be found in the distribution of medicines to all and sundry who might ask for them in the mountains.

We accordingly provided ourselves liberally with dressings, bandages, and such simple drugs as we knew to be harmless, and commenced our work in Algeria in an almost officious readiness to benefit, or at any rate to practise on, our neighbours. The natural love of both the Arab and the Shawia for anything which can be obtained for nothing soon brought us plenty of opportunities of getting rid of our drugs. No sooner did we become at all well known in a village than our residence would be besieged from morning until night by the halt and the maimed, some of them brought upon mules from many miles around, to try the effect of our pills, our tincture of iodine, our Elliman's, our salts, or, especially, our quinine, the use of which had become known throughout the hills, but for the purchase of which during a visit to a town the natives begrudged the money.

But not only the sick and injured demanded our assistance; many perfectly healthy spectators at our outdoor consultations considered that they, too, might benefit by a dose for some complaint to which they were liable, while some, more crafty than their neighbours, tried their best to secure a small stock of pills for various

ailments to be sold to their friends as occasion offered, probably with no regard at all to the suitability of the drug for the complaint. It was necessary, therefore, to keep a sharp eye on our patients and to administer medicine only to those who would swallow it in our presence.

Needless to say, very many sufferers were brought to us for whom we could do absolutely nothing, but if a "practice" which constantly increases in size can be taken as a criterion of the doctor's skill then, were it not for the fact that our aid was rendered gratis, and so to be eagerly sought, we should by this time have begun to regard ourselves as no mean practitioners of the healing art!

Any attempt at surgery, of course, we carefully avoided unless the syringing of ears can be dignified with the name of a minor operation. It seems that when once the traveller has commenced to syringe ears in the Aurès he can continue that unpleasant occupation all day without interruption.

No sooner will he have sent one patient away than some one among the spectators will insist upon undergoing the treatment, apparently in the belief that it will benefit him should he ever really require it in the future rather than with a view to removing any existing inconvenience; indeed upon one occasion, when a syringing had relieved a girl who was reputed to be deaf, we were absolutely besieged by applicants for the treatment, some of whom even accompanied us during a whole day's march when our medicine chest had already been packed on a mule preparatory to a move.

Lotions for the eyes, too, were in very great request, for diseases of the eye are extremely common in the desert and the hills, while all day long there came to us

parents bringing with them children suffering from skin complaints caused, no doubt, by the dirty surroundings in which the natives live.

Although we very soon found that free medicine can rapidly build up a practice in the hills and the desert, for a long time our carefully cloaked inquiries as to the existence of native doctors met with no response. Whenever we suggested to a surgical case that he should seek the aid of one of the skilful Shawia practitioners, the fame of whose reputation had reached us even in far-off England, we were assured that no such surgeons existed in the community, whereas we had heard from a French official that trepanning was frequently practised in the neighbourhood though, he said, we could hope for no such luck as to find the operator or see his instruments.

The only reply to our inquiries which we at first received was that all the sick and injured of the mountains immediately called in the assistance of the French official doctor at the nearest government post, many miles distant over the hills, a statement which we knew to be a lie; we began to despair, therefore, of ever finding a native surgeon, and to believe that all our distribution of pills and syringing of ears would turn out to be labour expended in vain. Suddenly, however, and quite unexpectedly, our luck changed.

Having long since given up asking the direct question as to whether or not a surgeon existed in the locality, we were chatting on general topics to a chief and a small group of natives in a village in which we had recently arrived, when I suddenly inquired of the headman if he thought the doctor of his community would care to receive one or two English scalpels such as I produced from my pocket for his inspection.

Apparently taken by surprise at my question the chief



replied, "No doubt he would; but here he is, let us ask him," and there, at last, stood before us a native surgeon, the nature of his calling revealed. Quick as thought we pressed home our advantage. Explaining to the somewhat disconcerted doctor that the fame of the practitioners of the Aurès had induced us to travel so far from our native land to learn something of their methods, that no one need fear that his name would be disclosed to the authorities if he should supply us with details of his art and that, even if (as the doctor doubtless believed) the surgery of Europe was in a deplorable condition, English cutlery, in the form of such instruments as we had brought with us, was of a quality unobtainable in the hills, we persuaded our newly found friend to accept a few presents from our medical stores, and to give us our first glimpse of the work of the surgeons of the Aurès. Delighted at the good fortune which seemed at last to be smiling upon our efforts, we spared no trouble to ingratiate ourselves with this the first practitioner we met, so that when the time arrived for us to leave his village in the spring of 1913, we had already seen something of his work, we had obtained from him all the instruments necessary for performing the operation of the trepan and, most important of all, we had persuaded him not only to continue the instruction he had given us during the following winter but also to promise us introductions to some of his colleagues in the hills. Thus, from a lucky and unexpected beginning, we were able to inaugurate our researches into Shawia medicine and surgery with a very fair prospect of success, for subsequent expeditions were to bring us into contact with most, if not all, of the leading practitioners of the Aurès, from whom we obtained later on a fund of information as to their

methods and a collection of instruments, numbering more than one hundred and fifty in all, of which some sixty representative examples may be found in the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford to-day.

Those who practise the healing art in the fastnesses of the Aurès, while lacking all modern instruction in medicine and surgery, can scarcely be termed untrained, for the budding practitioner undergoes a long period of apprenticeship to some established doctor, almost invariably a relative of his own, before he commences to make a livelihood by his art.

Thus for generations sons have learned from their fathers the craft which the family has followed for years uncounted, to pass on their knowledge to their children and so keep alive the mediæval surgery and medicine which we shall find is practised in parts of Algeria to this day. Working with the most primitive of tools, saws, drills, scalpels, probes, cauterics, etc., cast from the roughest iron by the silversmiths of the mountains, the Shawia surgeon employs no anæsthetic to diminish the sufferings of his patients, to whose natural toughness he must owe much of the success which he undoubtedly achieves. The patient—we might well say the victim—is held down by a number of assistants, his groans notwithstanding, and the surgeon wreaks his will upon him, relying, as he claims, upon the delicacy of his touch to reduce to a minimum the suffering his operations must necessarily cause.

But for all the crudity of his methods and the rough nature of his tools the Shawia surgeon can certainly point to some very remarkable results of his work.

The cases of trepanning, already referred to as having first drawn attention to the existence of real surgery in the hills, furnish excellent examples of what has been

and is being done. The frequency with which they have been noted is extraordinary.

In a stony country, among quick-tempered and vindictive natives, blows on the head requiring the removal of a piece of damaged bone from the skull are certain to be far from uncommon, but the Shawia surgeons appear to delight in this operation more than in such others as they can perform and, therefore, it is probably resorted to more frequently than is really necessary, while two French writers, Doctors Malbot and Verneau, many years ago recorded a case which had come before them of a living woman who had actually allowed a piece of bone to be removed from her skull in order to substantiate a fictitious charge of assault which she wished to prefer against her husband!

This oft-performed operation of the trepan may be chosen for description as providing an excellent example of the methods employed by the Shawia surgeons of the Aurès.

Let the reader imagine the interior of an ordinary dark and dirty stone hut, such as we have already described.

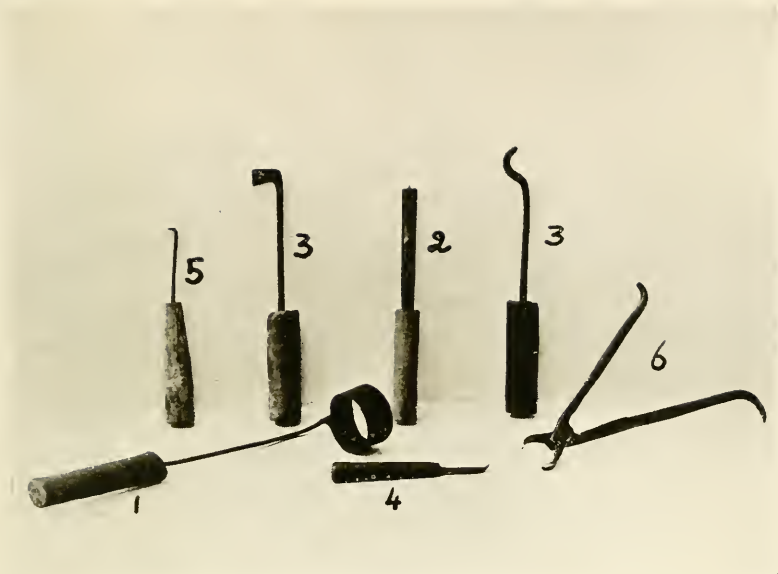
In a corner of it, upon a heap of mats, rugs or old sacks, lies the patient, surrounded by friends who have come in to help the surgeon, awaiting in his own home the arrival of the practitioner who has been summoned from some neighbouring village to attend him, for by no means every hamlet can boast of a doctor among its inhabitants. A fire glows upon the hearth tended by some of the women of the family, others of whom are busy tearing up strips of cotton dress material to serve as bandages, preparing bowls of water or, if they be skilled in the requirements of a Shawia sick-room, melting the butter and honey which the doctor will almost certainly require for his dressings.

Presently the great man arrives accompanied by one or more of his pupils.

A preliminary examination having shown him that an immediate operation should be performed, the doctor produces from a leathern wallet provided with several pockets, which he is wearing slung over his shoulder beneath his cloak, the few simple instruments he will require and, selecting the one with which he will commence his task, a scalping iron with a circular cutting edge some two inches in diameter very much resembling a large wad-punch such as is used by gunsmiths in England, he proceeds to heat it in the fire until it glows red-hot when, his assistants holding the patient in position, he applies it firmly to the scalp over the seat of the injury, the iron searing its way down to the bone, after which he removes by means of its red-hot edge the piece of scalp thus burnt round, the hot iron preventing the flow of blood which the use of a cold instrument would have caused.

This done he takes a drill, on the blade of which a couple of "shoulders" or projections are designed to guard against excessive penetration, and proceeds at once to bore a hole in the skull which may completely pierce it, should the surgeon consider it necessary to provide an outlet for any hæmorrhage which may have taken place beneath the bone, or which, in some cases, is drilled only partly through the skull in order to afford a starting-point for the saw. The European spectator will note when the surgeon commences to use his drill that not only does he seem to disregard even the most elementary principles of surgical cleanliness as understood in Europe, but that he does not even attempt to wash his instruments before use.

I have frequently questioned Shawia doctors upon this



SHAWIA SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS.

- |              |               |                    |
|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. Scalper.  | 2. Drill.     | 3. Saws.           |
| 4. Elevator. | 5. Retractor. | 6. Dental forceps. |



A DEMONSTRATION OF SPLINTING.



point, and have always received the reply that they clean their instruments *after* use only, and then merely by washing them in any water, cold or hot, which may be available.

The hole having been drilled into his skull, the patient will often be left to recover from the treatment he has undergone until the following day, when the doctor will return to continue the operation. During the next stage of the proceedings the surgeon applies to the hole he has made a small and often very coarse iron saw, the blade of which is usually flattened and turned down at right angles to the handle at its farther end, the end thus turned down being serrated with a number of roughly filed teeth. But the saw is used with great care, and only a very little work is done with it by most practitioners upon the first occasion of its use, the operation being recommenced daily until all of the bone to be removed has been sawn round, when it is raised by means of a small iron instrument resembling a screw-driver (I have found a European tool of this description in use by a Shawia for the purpose) and subsequently removed with the aid of iron retractors or hooks.

Upon some occasions so little use is made of the saw upon each daily visit of the doctor that one of the most successful practitioners I have met with frequently takes a fortnight or more to cut round a piece of bone as large as a halfpenny, his object being to reduce to a minimum the strain to which he must necessarily cause the sufferer to submit.

An operation having been completed, a dressing of honey, butter, and certain powdered herbs is applied to the part, which is then covered with a pad of sheep's wool held in place by dirty strips of dress material provided by the patient's household.

Such is the operation of the trepan as performed by one of my native surgeon friends and indeed, with very slight modifications, by all the practitioners I have met with in the Aurès.

Without attempting the wellnigh impossible task of deciding what percentage of success attends the Shawia surgeon or discussing further the various cases of head operations, and they are many, which came to my notice in the hills, I will merely give one definite example of recovery, that of the first such case I met with.

The patient was a youth who had received a violent blow from some such implement as a stone, or a club, or whose injury may have resulted from a fall upon a hillside; when I saw him in 1913, the portion of his skull to be removed had been but half sawn away, and he was suffering, in addition, from a fractured bone in the leg.

When I returned to the Aurès a year later I found the lad in an apparently excellent state of health, I saw the scar of the operation, and I procured from the surgeon the fragment of bone removed from his head, which fragment, together with others I have collected, may now be seen in the Pitt-Rivers Museum with the instruments used in its removal. While the operation of the trepan is one which is performed with remarkable frequency in the fastnesses of the Aurès, it is by no means the only one which the Shawia surgeons are capable of undertaking with success.

Not only do most of them carefully remove bone that has been injured by, let us say, gunshot wounds from the limbs, but some of them have succeeded in replacing such bone by pieces cut fresh from the limbs of animals although, curiously enough, no attempt is made to replace bone removed by trepanning, the skin of the scalp, reforming over the aperture, being the only covering deemed



necessary for the hole in the skull. There can be no doubt that the wiry constitutions of the Shawia do much to help their surgeons to success.

To any one unused to a life of hardship it may well seem incredible that the human frame can stand the appalling suffering which the operations of the Shawia surgeons must inflict; at the risk of harrowing my reader's feelings, therefore, I will describe a scene I witnessed in 1920 as an example of the treatment the native can and does endure.

I was invited by a surgeon well known and much respected over a wide area of country, who had come to regard me in the light of a pupil, to accompany him to a neighbouring village to see a case which was causing him much anxiety.

We found the patient lying upon the usual bundle of rugs, etc., in a large room in a patch of sunlight streaming through an open door. He was suffering from a lateral fracture of the knee-cap, the result of a fall in the mountains, the upper half of the knee-cap having been drawn upward, and so away from the lower half, by contraction of the muscles. The problem before the surgeon was how best to restore the upper fragment of bone to a position in which it could reunite with the lower one.

Causing four of the patient's friends who were present to hold the man still, the doctor attempted without success to force the bone downwards with his hands, wringing groans from the sufferer whom he and his assistants endeavoured to calm by means of rough chaff which, brutal though it would doubtless be considered in a European sick-room, certainly produced the desired effect of causing the patient to forget his agony as soon as the pressure on his injured limb was removed.

Finding himself unable to move the bone sufficiently by hand, the surgeon determined to resort to sterner measures.

Placing the round wooden handle of one of his instruments above the knee-cap, he proceeded to beat the bone downwards by means of heavy blows of an iron hammer applied to the wooden handle above it! The patient, his face like death, redoubled his previous groans.

At last, after nearly a dozen blows had been struck, the surgeon found that he had beaten the bone as far as he wished; he accordingly smeared some hot pitch over the surrounding skin, applied (by means of a red-hot iron) the cautery to which the natives resort upon every possible occasion and, finally, bandaged the knee in such a manner as he hoped would retain the two portions of the broken knee-cap in contact with one another.

This done, he murmured the usual "In the name of God," and the operation was at an end.

And now I come to the point of my story. Within five minutes of the application of the cautery (itself, I should imagine, a most unpleasant experience), after all the terrible agony he had endured during the slow pressing and the hammering of his injured knee, the patient calmly proceeded to join the doctor in a meal of meat and kuskus, ordering coffee for me, and directing his women-folk to explain to me the working of a loom which he had noticed I was looking at, laughing good-humouredly when I complimented him upon the fortitude he displayed!

In very truth a life of hardship has made the Shawia hard!

The native practitioner who carried out the treatment I have just described was very doubtful if it would prove successful for, although the Shawia are skilful enough

in the setting of ordinary fractures, for which purpose they often employ wooden splints shaped with an adze to fit the limb, they are ignorant of any means of wiring together the ends of a broken bone when these tend to separate as in the knee-cap which my friend was treating.

He was of opinion, therefore, that his hammering would prove to be useless, and that his patient would always be lame.

The great majority of the operations performed by the surgeons of the Aurès seem to be those necessitated by injuries to bones, for the Shawia appear to be very reluctant to interfere with the internal organs of the body, with the anatomy of which I believe most of them to be but ill acquainted.

Such small operations, however, as the application of cautery, a treatment that is used for almost every imaginable complaint, the introduction of "setons," and "cupping," or blood-letting, they daily perform in addition to the more serious ones to which I have referred.

The last-named operation, if the term can be applied to so simple a performance, is carried out by barbers and other laymen as well as by surgeons, so that the traveller, who can witness it in almost any village he visits, must not jump to the conclusion that he has caught a Shawia practitioner in the act of pursuing his calling, a mistake which I made in the beginning of my researches, and so undergo the disappointment which will follow when he discovers that the operation is performed everywhere by laymen, often in the street, with no attempt at secrecy whatever.

"Cupping" is usually carried out by making a number of small incisions in the back of the patient's

neck, a small tin cup being then pressed over these incisions from which the blood is induced to flow freely into it by means of suction, applied by the mouth of the doctor to a tube attached to the cup for this purpose, the tube being stopped up when the flow has started in order to maintain something approaching a vacuum in the cup. The extraction of teeth seems to be carried out as much or more by the jewellers and smiths of the mountains as by the doctors themselves, the forceps employed, not at all unlike in principle the modern instrument with which many of us are only too familiar, being furnished with handles bent up at the end to afford a firmer grip.

In a country in which chairs of any sort are unknown in native dwellings, the dentist, amateur or professional, often carries out his work in the street, the patient sitting upon the ground, his head between the knees of the torturer whose shoulders sway to and fro in the exertion of loosening and removing some particularly obstinate stump.

On the whole the teeth of the Shawia are good, but almost any jeweller, if asked whether he can wield the forceps with success, will produce for inspection a box full of ghastly trophies of his prowess as a dentist, and a large number of natives have applied to us for a cure for toothache in their very natural reluctance to place themselves at the mercy of the local doctor, jeweller or smith.

As regards the fees asked by Shawia surgeons for their operations, these appear to vary considerably according to the patient's capacity to pay; I have known a man who has received as much as a couple of hundred francs for an operation on the head, and who has asked another patient to put two francs in the mosque box to mark

his gratitude for a cure, refusing for himself all remuneration for a similar operation to the one for which he had received the sum, so large in his estimation, mentioned above from a richer sufferer; indeed it would seem that the doctors of the Aurès, while ready enough to accept high fees from the wealthy, are extremely generous in their treatment of the poor.

It must not be imagined that surgery alone is practised in the Aurès. On the contrary, all the doctors I have met with have been general practitioners, carrying on the medical as well as the surgical side of their profession.

Possessing a very remarkable knowledge of the plant life of their mountain land, they prepare the majority of their medicines from wild herbs which they seek among the rocks or in the gardens beside the streams, drying them in the shade and reducing them to powder, obtaining extract from them by pounding them when fresh in a large wooden mortar with a heavy pestle of wood, or even, in some rare cases, distilling them by means of a primitive "still," of which I was fortunate enough to secure a specimen.

Indeed the natives are of opinion that every plant which grows has its medicinal value if only its correct uses can be ascertained; the list, therefore, of local herbs used by the doctors must be very long indeed, while such herbs as are not to be found in the mountains, together with various other material, of which acetate of copper, sulphur, asafœtida and myrrh are examples, can be secretly purchased in the tiny native shops of the larger towns or from dealers in dried medicinal herbs who can be seen seated upon the ground, with their wares spread out around them, in the market place of many a centre of commerce in the neighbourhood of the hills.

It is not my purpose here to deal in any detail with all the various operations and forms of treatment carried out by the Shawía practitioners of the Aurès ; I have attempted to describe some of the surgery I have observed among them to the History Section of the Royal Society of Medicine in London, and I hope some day to publish in full the results of my work among the doctors in the hills, the now very numerous notes upon the practice of medicine and drugs, as well as upon surgery, which we have been lucky enough to acquire ; but the reader may well ask one question to which I will endeavour to supply an answer, " Whence is derived the healing art as practised in the Aurès to-day ? "

By the instruments used by the Shawía surgeons, by the drugs employed in their treatment of disease and, especially, by the Arabic books to which the natives from time to time refer in cases which perplex them, we are driven to the conclusion that the healing art of eastern Algeria entered that country in the wake of the Mohammedan religion ; that is to say that Shawía, who embraced that religion and undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca, which it prescribes for all the faithful to whom the task is possible, in days gone by spent some time in the study of medicine and surgery in such centres of mediæval learning as Tunis or Cairo or even more distant cities of the Moslem world, and that they there acquired a knowledge of thirteenth-century Arab medicine and surgery which they have passed on by oral tradition from father to son in their families until it has been found in existence, little modified by the lapse of time, in the heart of the Aurès to-day. These families whose ancestors introduced the healing art into the hills and whose members still follow the medical profession are, curiously perhaps, not regarded as holy or maraboutic, nor are they in any



DRUG SELLER IN A MARKET.



DRESSING A FINGER IN THE STREET.





way to be confused with the charlatans, the writers of charms and the sorceresses, whom we have already found to exist in comfort upon the credulity of a naturally superstitious race.

Nevertheless, with medicine in a state similar to that existing in parts of Europe seven centuries ago, it is not surprising to find that professional doctors employ certain forms of treatment which are obviously magical in origin, and that magicians recommend others which may even reasonably be expected to produce the desired results. Thus a well-known Shawia surgeon has informed me that one eye of the owl is permanently wakeful while the other eye is sleepy.

In order to ascertain which is the wakeful eye the two are placed in a bowl of water, whereupon the sleepy one sinks to the bottom, leaving the wakeful eye afloat upon the surface.

The latter, my Shawia friend asserts, is a valuable charm to be worn around the neck by persons of a sleepy disposition, while the sleepy eye should be so worn by those who suffer from insomnia.

Further examples of the magical value of sundry materials employed by professional doctors are to be found in the use of earth as a dressing because "as we are sprung from the earth it must, of necessity, be good for us," and the wearing of the paw of a porcupine by young mothers as a preventative against soreness of the breast, a practice which is recommended even by doctors who enjoy a wide reputation for their surgical and medical skill.

On the other hand a magician, possessed of no knowledge of practical medicine whatever, once explained to me as follows the cause of epidemics of disease and the measures he recommends to combat them.

The epidemics are caused by whole armies of invisible "jenoun," or demons, who, invading a village in their thousands, strike down the inhabitants, spreading wholesale slaughter as they go.

The only wise course for the people to follow, according to the magician, is to abandon the unequal struggle against their supernatural foes and to flee to the pine woods of the higher slopes of the Aurès, whither the "jenoun" will not dare to pursue them owing to their supposed dread of the smell of the pine tree, small pieces of which are often worn as charms against illness by the Shawía.

It would seem from these instances that the magician is sometimes as scientific in the remedies he recommends as the real doctors are occasionally the reverse, indeed among a people still in a primitive state of culture the exact border line between medicine and magic is almost impossible to define, for who, bearing in mind that faith-healing has a powerful hold upon many people in communities such as our own, will care to deny that even the wearing of written amulets, so implicitly believed in by the natives, may produce a beneficial effect in some cases among the Shawía?

## CHAPTER X

### THE VALLEYS OF THE DJEBEL CHERCHAR

BISKRA—A DESERT JOURNEY—OUR RECEPTION AT ZERIBET EL WED—HORSES—KHANGA SIDI NADJI—A MODEL VILLAGE—JOURNEY TO OULDJA—A PREHISTORIC OLIVE PRESS—DOMESTIC LIFE AMONG THE SHAWÍA—CHEBLA—VISIT TO KHEIRANE—THE CLIFF VILLAGE OF DJELLAL—WE FINISH OUR WORK AT TABERDGA—A ROAD THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS.

NOW that we had traversed the western and central valleys of the Aurès, in order to complete, as far as possible, our survey of the land of the Shawía the necessity arose to undertake a journey from south to north up the valleys beneath the great ridge of the Djebel Cherchar, which, as we have seen, forms the eastern bastion of the massif, so that we might compare the arts and crafts, manners and customs of their inhabitants with those we had already attempted to examine further to the west.

In order to reach a suitable starting-point at the foot of the hills for such an expedition, we found ourselves obliged to travel some fifty miles or more over the desert to the east of Biskra, to which centre, therefore, we descended by train to prepare for the journey which lay before us.

During our stay at Biskra to rest after our wanderings amid the luxuries of its civilization in the glorious climate of the spring, so delightful after the rapid changes of temperature we had experienced in the Aurès, we found plenty to occupy our time.

“The Queen of the Zibans,” as the place is called, while scarcely a spot in which to attempt a study of native life owing to the mixture of races to be found in it, is a centre to which so many natives, Shawia from the Aurès as well as nomads from the great desert, come in to make purchases, that we were continually encountering old friends from remote camps and hamlets who were always glad to see us and to supply us with the latest gossip of the little world in which they moved.

Indeed, we could scarcely walk a yard from our hotel without being carried off to consume coffee by some one whom we had met in the desert or the hills, so that our holiday from research work among the natives really resembled that of the oft-quoted “busman,” but, nevertheless, our surroundings in a centre of civilization proved restful enough.

After our usual practice of turning in almost at dusk in order to save our stock of candles, we took a childish delight in sitting up late at the Casino listening to the strains of an orchestra, whose music appeared divine to ears accustomed to the wailing of the oboe and the monotonous beating of the drum; while to sit in the warmth of the early evening outside a well-appointed café and consume an *apéritif* to the strains of a band seemed to us the very height of luxury; and, even though we may prefer the glories of nature unrestrained to the finest efforts of the gardener, we experienced an extraordinary feeling of delight in roaming beneath the palms in the scrupulously tidy and well-ordered garden of the Château Landon, the neatness of which afforded such a contrast to the surroundings we had left behind us in the hills.

It is not my intention to attempt any description of Biskra. This has been attempted, and, as far as pen can achieve it, accomplished by so many writers of guide-

books and travellers, not to mention a well-known author of fiction, that my halting pen can add nothing to their word-pictures of the great oasis and its surroundings, indeed, an account of life in a modern tourist resort scarcely falls within the scope of a work that aims at nothing more than to bring remoter regions to the notice of the traveller and to throw some light upon the daily lives and customs of natives unspoiled by contact with the outer world. I will pass over, therefore, the incidents of our various visits to Biskra and invite the reader to accompany us upon our journey in the desert to Zeribet el Wed, the headquarters of the nomad Arabs of the Zab Chergui district of the Sahara, whence we were to turn northward to the hills.

During our previous travels we had become acquainted with the Kaïd of this area, a descendant of the great family from Barika to which, as we have seen, the people of Menaâ still pay tribute in their gratitude for the foundation of their village, and he, upon our meeting him in Biskra just before our departure for his country, kindly asked us to stay with him at Zeribet before going up into the mountains, and offered to send us from his own oasis the couple of camels we should require for our baggage, thus relieving us of the necessity for searching for a comparatively reasonable camel owner within reach of the hotels of Biskra, a search to which that for a needle in a haystack would seem simple by comparison. Upon the morning fixed for our departure, therefore, the camels duly arrived at the time appointed (a fact which is not so common as to pass unnoticed by the traveller, and which showed that animals ordered by a chief are more to be relied upon than some others), and, having superintended their loading, we sent them on to the oasis of Sidi Okba in the charge of a mounted

orderly, whose services the French officer in command of the military district in which Biskra lies had courteously placed at our disposal, with orders to await our arrival by diligence in the evening.

For Sidi Okba lies but a dozen miles to the south-east of Biskra, and, as we were to spend the first night of our journey there, we had succumbed to the temptations of the fleshpots of our hotel, and had decided to commence our travels by carriage in the afternoon in preference to riding beside slow-moving camels—a monotonous experience, as many hundreds of miles of desert travelling had long since taught me, and one to be avoided when possible.

An hour or two before sundown, therefore, we drew up outside a gateway in one of Sidi Okba's narrow sandy lanes, after rattling over the road from Biskra in the ramshackle coach which carries the mail, and alighted at the house of the sheikh, himself absent at Biskra, who had been requested by the French authorities to provide us with accommodation for the night.

Finding that a room equipped with European furniture had been got ready for us, and that supper was in course of preparation, we had nothing to do for ourselves. We accordingly set off in company of one of the elders of the village council to renew our acquaintance with the place formed many years ago, and to pay a visit, together with my customary mite, to the tomb of the warrior saint of Islam, Sidi Okba ben Nafi, the first Arab invader of the Barbary States, who, slain by the warlike Berbers of the Aurès, sleeps his last sleep beneath a "kouba" attached to the mosque which bears his name, a mosque more visited by Europeans, perhaps, than any other in Algeria, for few tourists are allowed to stay for any time at Biskra without being taken to inspect it. The mosque

itself, though larger and better built than is usually the case in Saharan places of worship, has little of real interest, other than its historical associations, to offer to any one who has already visited a number of such buildings, though the view from its minaret over vast stretches of the desert with a magnificent panorama of the Aurès to the north glowing beneath the rays of the setting sun, kept us engrossed in the occupation of picking out many familiar peaks and landmarks until the approach of the short twilight warned us that the time had arrived to return to our room in the sheikh's house to rest, in view of an early start upon the morrow.

Leaving Sidi Okba behind us we rode eastward over a level desert of dry earth, in which sand was practically non-existent, to the small oasis of Aïn Naga, ten or twelve miles distant, the glorious views of the Aurès always visible to the north, while the flat landscape of the desert around shimmered in the glare of a powerful sun before us and to the south. The weather now, at the end of March, was distinctly warm for travelling in the open plains, where no shade of any sort is obtainable between the oases; we were glad enough, therefore, of the protection afforded by a couple of cheap topees, bought in Biskra, as we moved over the arid wastes of the Sahara towards the few palms of Aïn Naga, a mere cluster of huts amid some extremely unfertile looking gardens, above which but an insignificant number of date-palms reared their heads skyward, their long branch-like leaves motionless in the quiet of the early afternoon as we rode up to the "bordj" which had been built among them for the convenience of passing officers.

Here, although there is no resident guardian who can prepare a meal for the wayfarer, we found that ample provision had been made for us by the Kaïd of Zeribet,

who had arrived before us to spend a few days in the oasis which lay within his borders, and had arranged for a meal to be sent in from some hut or tent close by, so that we had only to wander about Aïn Naga for an hour or two, ample time in which to become thoroughly familiar with all the attractions of the place, and then turn into our blankets spread upon the floor of an upper room in a solid well-constructed building.

The third and last stage of our march to Zeribet el Wed was considerably longer than either of the preceding days' journeys, but the heat of the day was tempered by a cool breeze and we rode a couple of willing mules, who got over the ground at a sufficient pace to bring us to our destination well before darkness set in, so that we suffered no discomforts whatever on the way. Indeed, this desert journey compared most favourably with many of the long days of marching, with nothing in view save the dreary level of the horizon, which I had endured in the far south in years gone by, for here, but a few miles south of the Aurès, a fine panorama of mountain scenery, of barren ruddy rocks reflecting in many wonderful shades the rays of the scorching sun, was always in view as we travelled, and a mirage, invisible scarcely for a moment, produced the effect of sheets of glassy water a few hundreds of yards before us, which, ever receding as we advanced, kept up their illusion until, coming to the top of some imperceptibly rising ground, we descried the mud huts of Zeribet el Wed and the summits of its palm trees just showing above the banks of the stream which waters its oasis. Of native life we had seen practically nothing by the way.

A few nomad women drawing water at a well a little distance from the track, whom we had asked to supply our animals with a drink, rewarding them with a handful



of matches and such information as they demanded as to our names, ages, number of children, their sexes, ages, etc., in short, the usual "particulars" required by native women of a European stranger, and sundry nomad families, passing with their worldly possessions carried upon their slow-moving camels, were the only human beings we encountered between the oases at which we had halted for the night.

At Zeribet, however, we were to see and, in turn, be inspected by a host of the Arabs of the plains.

Hospitably entertained by the Kaïd's cousin in the absence of our host himself, we were lodged in apartments in the chief's house, which might well have been removed in their entirety from a neatly furnished hotel, and so long as we remained beneath the roof of the great man his official uniformed orderlies, of whom he employed about half a dozen, would allow no intrusion upon our privacy, but the moment we proceeded to wander about the village unattended by an orderly we were almost literally mobbed. It appears that travellers, other than passing officials, do not frequent Zeribet, and that the vast majority of its women-folk, the greater number of whom pass their lives in the tents of the Sahara, and pay but an occasional visit to the oasis, had never previously beheld a white woman; their curiosity, therefore, quite got the better of them, and, being nomads and so freer from restraint than their sisters of the towns, of Arab race though they were, they crowded round us directly we appeared to catch a glimpse of my wife.

Young and old, they rushed to look at her, even elderly matrons literally fighting their way through the throng, hurling aside boys and girls who impeded their way in their eagerness to obtain a closer view, and questioning those who had already inspected her as they

passed, the motley crowd, in which a number of men was added to the women and the children, arousing such a commotion in the lanes inches deep in sand that we momentarily expected suffocation.

Eventually one of the women would contrive to get my wife into her house, whither I usually accompanied her, for I was allowed into an extraordinary number of dwellings, considering that Zeribet is an Arab village, whereupon all her relations and friends as well, I should imagine, as even her most distant "bowing acquaintances" would troop in after us to watch our hostess proudly doing the honours of her home to a "Roumiya," a European woman, who had been so unexpectedly called upon to play a very good imitation of the part of the freak in a circus procession.

This sort of reception, which was accorded to us every time we wandered around the village, was by no means such as we had expected in an oasis like Zeribet, which lies not more than fifty miles from Biskra, and could even be reached in a car, for the track leading to it lies, as we have seen, over desert devoid of sand, though the innumerable little mounds, but a few inches high, with which the ground is covered would necessitate careful driving, and render the journey by no means luxurious. Cars, however, have certainly sometimes reached the oasis conveying military officers upon their tours of duty.

Zeribet el Wed, or "The enclosure of the river," lies a few hundred yards to the north-west of the junction of two streams which flow into the desert from the hills; the Wed Guechtan from the eastern side of Amar Khraddou, and the Wed el Arab, which, flowing through the valley upon the western side of the Djebel Cherchar, emerges from the hills through the defile of Khanga Sidi Nadji, a dozen miles to the north.

In the depression formed by these streams are situated the date-groves of Zeribet, their heads scarcely appearing above the level of the surrounding desert to the traveller approaching from the west. While a certain amount of irrigation is carried out in the gardens by means of the system of "seggias" employed in the hills, the presence of a large number of shallow wells among them enables another method to be used, namely watering by means of the "shadoof," a method extremely common in the Sahara, but not to be found in the mountain districts I have already described. The "shadoof" consists in a pillar of brick or palm-trunk, standing upright beside the well, to the top of which a long pole is so attached that its upper end can be pulled down to the mouth of the well and, by means of a weight consisting of a large stone attached to its shorter lower end, raised automatically to its vertical position again when the pressure which has so pulled it down is relaxed.

The bucket of goatskin is attached by a cord to the top of the pole, and is pulled down to lower it into the well, the weight of the stone raising the pole, and so drawing the bucket to the surface, when the native who is using the contrivance allows it to do so by relaxing his hold on the cord.

If the water so drawn up is intended for the irrigation of the garden it is at once poured from the bucket into a small trough, whence miniature canals, or "seggias," convey it to the part it is desired to flood. The village of Zeribet el Wed requires no careful description here.

Its houses of mud brick, its narrow winding lanes, its cafés, and its tiny native shops, to which the nomads of the neighbouring camps send in for their simple requirements, are all such as can be found in any oasis of the northern desert, for example, El Kantara, Djemora, or

Branis, and, indeed, its inhabitants should not properly be studied at Zeribet, but rather in their real homes, the tents of the Sahara; for Zeribet, like Djemora, is the headquarters of a wandering people, and not the residence of any considerable number of Arabs.

The district of the Zab Chergui, of which Zeribet is the chief oasis, is noted for its horses, large numbers of the best animals in the northern desert having been bred in the camps around.

The French, therefore, are in the habit of sending two or three valuable stallions there for a part of the year to encourage the Arabs in their taste for horse-breeding, with the result that some very fine animals indeed are sometimes to be seen in the hands of the natives, the pedigrees of which the owners hold in writing and proudly display to any one who delights them by taking an interest in their horses.

Our stay at Zeribet el Wed beneath the hospitable roof of its Kaïd, who, with the help of his "Khalifa," or second-in-command, his cousin, entertained us most royally, was thoroughly enjoyable, but we were already nearing the end of March, and we had a considerable journey to perform through the region of the Djebel Cherchar before the weather should become unbearable in the lower country, and unpleasantly hot even on the plateau to the north of the Aurès, we therefore moved on after several days at Zeribet to begin once more our work among the Berbers.

We rode out from Zeribet upon our short journey to Khanga Sidi Nadji, a large oasis at the foot of the mountains, in the early afternoon, beneath a sun which made us rejoice more than ever in our newly-acquired topees, and following, more or less closely, the course of the Wed el Arab we headed for the small oasis of Liana,



KHANGA SIDI NADI.

To face p. 208.



just before reaching which we passed upon our right the tiny hamlet of Badès, built upon a little mound in the level desert, a mound said to consist of the ruins of a former town, for, according to El Bekri, the mediæval Arab geographer, in the eleventh century Badès was a place of considerable importance and boasted of two fortresses.

At Liana we halted for a few minutes to partake of coffee in the house of its sheikh, and we were joined by a uniformed orderly from the Kaïd of Khanga Sidi Nadji, into whose area we had now passed, who was to escort us to the home of his master.

After leaving Liana we forded the Wed el Arab, and continued along its left or eastern bank until we joined an excellent track, quite passable at this point by wheeled traffic, leading us to the oasis of Khanga at the point at which it turned to the north-east towards the eastern valley beneath the Djebel Cherchar; a track to which I shall have to refer at end of this chapter.

Before reaching Khanga we entered a valley at the foot of the hills in which the oasis lies, and finally emerged from its palm groves to obtain a beautiful view of the village itself, lying at the foot of a steep hillside on the eastern bank of the Wed el Arab, its cluster of houses overlooked by the tall well-built minaret of a mosque. Even as we rode for the first time through its winding streets towards the residence of its chief we could not fail to notice an air of cleanliness and absence of decay, which seemed to mark it as a place apart from any Algerian village we had seen, and, as we pulled up in a large open square near the Kaïd's house and were received by the chief himself, surrounded by well-dressed members of his family, we realized that here at Khanga we had found no ordinary settlement of the desert and the hills.

The Kaïd received us with the quiet hospitality of manner and a dignity belonging to a bygone age, such as we had come to expect from a member of one of the ancient families of Algeria, and conducted us to a delightful three-roomed dwelling, furnished in the European style with everything we could wish for, even for the longest of visits, a house used by the Administrator of the district in the cool weather, which we approached through a small but charming garden, beneath whose palms we at once noticed the rare luxury of flowers, and around which a high wall of mud brick safeguarded our privacy from the well-meant but sometimes wearisome attentions of inquisitive natives. Here, indeed, we were in luxury!

A delightful climate, not yet too hot to be pleasant, a charming residence, and a beautiful garden in which the sound of running water from a "seggia" almost banished from our recollection the very existence of a desert, the quiet peace of the whole atmosphere of the place caused us first to wonder whether or not we were in the land of dreams, and then, as we thought of the cold of the high passes, the glare of the Sahara, the draughts and the fleas of remote Shawia hamlets, to ask one another if we could ever bring ourselves to leave the place and wander again in the mountains!

The whole of our stay at Khanga Sidi Nadji consisted of one great round of entertainment, for not only the Kaïd of the place, but also his cousin, the Kaïd of Ouldja, whose territory we were soon to visit, inhabited the village, as did a number of their grown-up sons and nephews, members of the great and respected Arab family of Bel Hacine, each of whom vied with his relations in the task of entertaining us and showing us everything of interest they could think of.

Although the village of Khanga Sidi Nadji consists



only of a number of mud-brick houses amid its groves of twenty thousand palms, it seems well deserving of more than passing notice, for it is a fine example of a prosperous settlement, founded, enlarged, and almost entirely maintained by the great family which has held sway over it for centuries gone by, a member of which is its Kaïd to-day.

Surrounded by a wall, in reality consisting mainly of the continuous outer walls of some of its houses and gardens, the village can be entered by four gateways, situated one at each point of the compass, of which the great wooden doors are closed by night. The streets, narrow and tortuous, but cleaner than those of any other native village I am acquainted with, lie between rows of dwellings, most of them built of mud brick, among which a certain amount of stone work is to be found, especially in the lower floors of the houses, most of which boast an upper story, the stones being as a rule very neatly trimmed.

The general impression produced by the houses is that such care had been expended upon their upkeep that the old are scarcely distinguishable from the new, a state of things which could not exist for a moment in an Algerian community in which some influential chief was not constantly in residence, taking a personal pride in the maintenance of his village, and insisting upon, or subscribing to, its necessary repairs.

In the heart of the village are to be found the residences of the Kaïds of Khanga and of Ouldja, with those of their relations, large well-built structures of mud brick, the house of the former chief lying next door to the mosque, with which it is connected by cloisters, the arches of which are of a solidity rarely to be found in the desert, and quite unknown in the hills. The history of this

mosque and, indeed, that of the whole village for its three centuries of existence is simply that of the Bel Hacine family, which history the existing Kaïd never tired of discussing with us, for, proud as he is of his ancient lineage, he was most anxious that we should learn and appreciate all that his ancestors, whose "tree" he wrote out for us, had done for the worldly as well as for the spiritual welfare of the place.

The village having been founded some three hundred years ago by the Bel Hazines, and named after Sidi Nadji, one of their ancestors (the word "Khanga" signifying "gorge"), its existing mosque was erected at a later date by craftsmen from Tunis, with which city the family had some connection, being friendly with its Bey. The employment of Tunisian architects and builders has resulted in the construction of a mosque which is superior in beauty and solidity to any other I have seen in south-eastern Algeria. Its arches are evenly and truly built, its doors are neatly carved, and its cloisters, already referred to, built of small bricks, though of no great size, appeared to be representative of an architecture much in advance of that usually to be found in the Sahara.

The family mausoleum is situated beneath a dome in a building opening out from the main hall or chapel of the mosque, and in it repose all members of the Bel Hacine clan, women as well as men, who have passed away since its construction.

Texts or mural tablets, their characters executed in relief, are to be seen over each of the main doorways, a similar tablet containing a message from a former Bey of Tunis, who had visited Khanga, being displayed upon the wall inside the mosque. In addition to maintaining the usual officials of a Mohammedan place of worship, the Bel Hazines employ a teacher of religion and law for

the instruction of those who would study there, and have provided a library of works for use in this "zawia," for the family is maraboutic as well as old, and accordingly keeps up one of those establishments which, as we have seen, are commonly the residences of the saintly families of Algeria. But, besides looking after the spiritual well-being of their neighbours less plentifully supplied with this world's goods than themselves, the succeeding chieftains of the Bel Hacine line have made it a point of honour each to add something to the temporal prosperity of the village or its oasis; thus some have constructed new "seggias" to bring more land under cultivation by means of the waters of the Wed el Arab, one of the most considerable rivers of the hills, others have planted extensive gardens, while all appear to have carried on the family tradition of philanthropy, not perhaps quite untempered with profit to themselves, from generation to generation in the past. As the oasis grew larger and the wealth of the village increased, it was found necessary, in the days before the arrival of the French, to provide some means of defence against any jealous rivals of its ruling family, or the "goums" of the marauding nomad tribes of the Sahara. A fort was, therefore, erected on the crest of the ridge overlooking the oasis from the east, its ruins clearly indicating that Tunisian builders, such as had constructed the mosque, had been employed upon the task. This stronghold of very solid brick, entered by one arched gateway from the south, offered shelter in its courtyard to the ordinary inhabitants of the village, while it afforded accommodation, in the shape of rooms in an inner building, to the members of the saintly family which had caused its construction. So progressive were the Bel Hazines at this period of their history that they even armed their fortress with

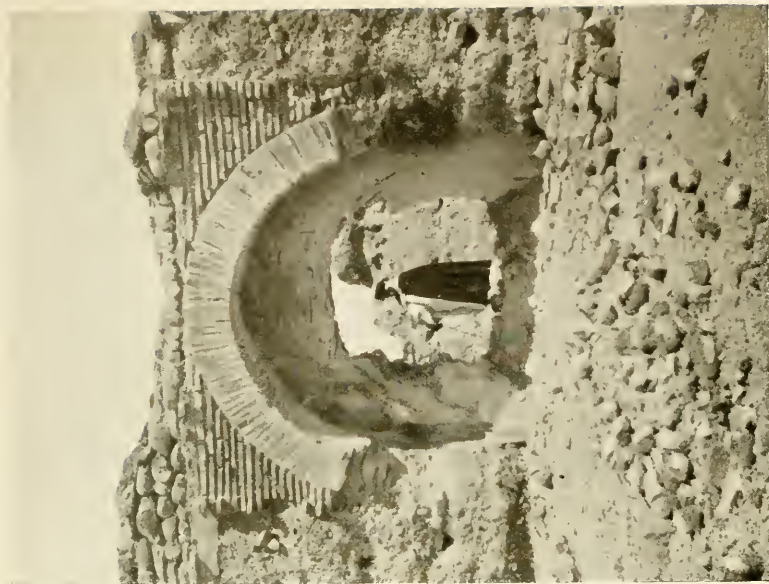
cannon, weapons which, I believe, eventually caused the destruction of the place, for a Bey of Constantine, under whom the Kaïds of the country nominally held sway, when upon a visit to Khanga was so impressed by the strength and armament of its defences that by political persuasion, rather than by force, he contrived to bring about their demolition, fearful, no doubt, of the consequences to his own authority should he permit his subordinates to indulge in the possession of fortresses equipped with guns. It was a genuine pleasure to us to wander around the oases of Khanga, its village, and its mosque, accompanied by the Kaïd, listening to his description of the constructive policy of his ancestors, observing the various improvements he himself had carried out or intended to undertake, or standing by while the chief inquired into the welfare of some individual among his people for all the world like some old-time British squire passing the time of day with a villager, whose small affairs would appear to interest him as much as all the broad acres which he owned.

Until but a few years since the head of the Bel Hacine family held sway over the very extensive area known as the Djebel Cherchar, the great ridge of which mountain was included in his dominions, but during some recent changes in the administration of the district the authorities decided to divide the large "kaidat" into four smaller ones, two of which were allotted to members of its former ruler's clan, the Bel Hazines to-day holding the posts of Kaïds of Khanga Sidi Nadji and of Ouldja, a village but a few miles up the course of the Wed el Arab to the north, whose chief, as we have seen, has his residence at Khanga, the headquarters of his cousin.

When the time approached for us to move on from Khanga Sidi Nadji, the mixed Arab and Berber population



THE KAÏD OF KHANGA IN THE CLOISTERS OF HIS MOSQUE.



GATEWAY OF THE OLD FORT.



of which rendered it by no means so ideal for our studies as its comforts, its scenery, and its genial chief had made it as a resting-place, we were confronted with the choice of two routes by which we could reach some of the higher Berber hamlets upon the slopes of the Djebel Chechar.

One, the excellent track by which we had entered Khanga, leading beneath the eastern side of the great ridge to the Shawia villages of Djellal and Taberdga, which we desired to visit, though by far the easier path to follow, had little else to offer us by the way; the other, following the rocky valley of the Wed el Arab to Ouldja, Chebla, and Kheirane in the north, though by no means so easy, would enable us to see these three Berber hamlets before turning to the east, climbing the ridge of the Djebel Cherchar itself, and descending upon Djellal and Taberdga from the west. Naturally we selected the latter as affording us better opportunities of seeing more of native life, and, as for the difficulty or otherwise of a mountain path, so long as a mule can traverse it so can the traveller upon its back; while if the way, as is very rarely the case, is quite impossible for a mule, then the wanderer must avoid it altogether, or leave behind him his baggage, his blankets, and his stores, for these must be transported upon mule-back in any case, without which he cannot well stay in the remote hamlets of the hills.

The Kaïd of Ouldja, learning of our decision, at once sent a message to his village directing that a house be prepared for us, and, an attack of rheumatism preventing him from accompanying us in person, he handed us over to his son, Si Abdelhamed, who was to escort us to Ouldja and do the honours of the place in his father's stead. Leaving our delightful house and garden, and

the families of our hosts, with whose women-folk my wife had become friendly, we rode out of Khanga to descend at once into the bed of the Wed el Arab, accompanied by the Kaïd of Khanga, mounted upon a magnificent black mare, and Si Abdelhamed, bestriding an equally magnificent chestnut stallion. The northern limit of his dominions lying at no great distance up the river, the chief escorted us towards this point and then, after cordially inviting us to visit his area again, turned back, leaving us to continue our way to the gorge, from which Khanga Sidi Nadji derives the first part of its name, accompanied by the son of the chief of Ouldja and a native mounted orderly, who had been sent by the Administrator of the region to meet us.

At the beginning of our journey we found it necessary frequently to ford the Wed el Arab, a stream which held a good deal of water, but whose bed was sufficiently wide at this point to enable it to be used as a path without danger of sudden flood.

The country between Khanga Sidi Nadji and Ouldja is rocky and extremely barren, the gorge, by no means so deep or imposing as the others which we had traversed farther to the west, lying between hills of a pale yellow tint upon which plant life was reduced to a minimum; it was, therefore, with a feeling of some relief, after passing through such a country in the glare of a powerful sun, that we entered the oasis beside the Wed el Arab of the little stone-built Shawia village of Tebouia Hamed to rest for a few minutes on our way.

We were conducted by the headman to a room in which to partake of coffee and dessert, where we noticed a small point connected with superstitions that we had never observed in the other parts of the Aurès we had yet visited. Over the doors and all the windows of the



apartment were affixed little written charms, unprotected by any covering of cloth or leather, the object of which was to prevent the entry of scorpions into the room.

Scorpions are said to be very plentiful in the area of the Djebel Cherchar during the summer months, accordingly we found similar charms in every native house as we progressed, but the pests must be at least as common farther to the west, where the usual method of guarding against their bite consists merely in the wearing of a charm upon the person, certain scribes of the Aurès being believed to be capable of writing words and signs upon a certain kind of bone which, if worn, will enable the wearer to pick up by hand any scorpion unharmed.

After but a brief halt at Tebouia we rode on to Ouldja, our destination, where we found that a hut had been prepared for us, carpets laid down, and a table provided, the two latter having been sent on by the Kaïd from Khanga in the charge of one of his servants, who was to cook for us during our stay.

The village of Ouldja, its huts of untrimmed stone situated upon a low spur projecting into the valley of the Wed el Arab from its eastern side, was obviously of true Shawia type, but its oasis, which lies beneath it, was somewhat different to any we had previously seen, for its trees consisted of about equal numbers of date-palms and olive trees, growing in the same gardens, to which a number of other fruit trees were added.

The olive trees were valuable enough to the natives as they enabled them to produce the oil which is so much used in cooking in the hills, and concerning the preparation of which we gleaned some interesting information.

In another village, at Beni Ferah to be exact, we had

noticed a system of bruising the olives in a circular trough by means of a heavy stone roller, which, drawn by a mule, moves round and round the trough, pivoting upon a revolving wooden post in the centre; after which the bruised olives are boiled and placed in baskets beneath a massive tree-trunk, one end of which rests upon a ledge in the wall of the house, while a heavy stone attached to the other end lends additional weight to the tree, so that it presses hard upon the baskets beneath it, and thus causes the oil to exude from the olives. This system has been found by eminent archæologists to have existed, exactly in the state in which we found it, in the time of the Roman occupation of Algeria, but here, at Ouldja, we discovered another system of obtaining oil which must be very much more ancient still, very possibly, it would seem, dating back to prehistoric times.

The bruising of the olives is carried out by the very simple process of moving a large stone to and fro upon them by hand, while, when boiled and placed in their baskets, they are laid upon one large stone, a woman then standing upon another slab of rock placed on the top of the baskets, her weight, as she transfers it from one foot to the other, giving the pressure required to cause the oil to flow. Up to the present a pressure of other work has prevented our searching for a parallel to this system among the industries of other ancient peoples, but there can be no doubt that such a simple method of obtaining oil must be of very great antiquity indeed, so that we may well presume that a prehistoric craft, which we noted first at Ouldja, exists to this day all over the fastnesses of the Djebel Cherchar. During our short stay at Ouldja we devoted our time, as usual, to prying into the native's concerns, an occupation to which no one seemed in the least to object, and we found

an opportunity of witnessing a wedding in one of the very poorest cottages, a ceremony which differed in no essential detail from others we had seen at Beni Ferah and elsewhere.

In the Djebel Cherchar, as elsewhere in the Aurès, the sons of wealthy parents frequently marry at an absurdly early age, a state of single blessedness being looked upon with disfavour by the Shawia, and also by their Arab neighbours; but in poor families, such as the one whose guests we were at the wedding at Ouldja, the bridegroom, who must be in a position to maintain his wife, is usually rather older. After the wedding it is by no means uncommon for the young couple to take up their abode in the house of the bridegroom's father, in which they are provided with a separate apartment, the daughter-in-law becoming the assistant of her husband's mother, turning her hand to any of the hundred and one tasks which are the daily lot of the Berber women, her position in the bosom of her husband's family being rendered less precarious than it might be in a more civilized community by the fact that her mother-in-law is only too thankful for her help in the performance of such domestic duties. If, as time goes on, no olive branches appear in the family then, indeed, the young wife may well look forward to the future with dismay, for she will be considered to have failed in her natural duties and may expect her husband to divorce her with no more ceremony than if he were getting rid of an unsatisfactory mule, leaving her to return, unwanted and disgraced, to the home of her parents, there to earn her living by her household work, the object of the sneers of her more fortunate acquaintances. But the arrival of a child, especially of a son, may reasonably be expected to give the girl a new lease of life as the wife of the man she has married. The event

itself, so easy as scarcely ever to require the presence of one of those Shawía doctors, some of whose operations we have described, is made the occasion of much singing, dancing, feasting, and other rejoicing should the child be of the male sex, but is passed over in gloomy silence on the part of the husband and his relations should a daughter be born in the household.

When old enough many of the boys are sent to school. That is to say, they squat in a semi-circle learning, first, the Arabic characters from little wooden boards (the last vestige, probably, of the tablets of ancient Rome), or repeating texts from the Koran in chorus and at such a pace that evidently no meaning of the texts is considered so long as their form is acquired.

Education, even in this most elementary form, is not required by the girls, whose time is fully occupied about the house, their father often paying but little heed to them until they reach the age at which suitors may be expected to seek their hands with pecuniary advantage to their parent.

The father, however, takes considerably more interest in his sons. From the age of six onwards they will, by watching him at his various tasks, learn to help him in them, for, like the cannibal tribes of Central Africa and other primitive peoples, the Shawía are very forward and promising when young, often, it must be confessed, quite failing as they grow up to fulfil this early promise owing, no doubt, to the absence of a good native system of education in the remote hamlets of the hills.

Although we found so ancient a method of olive pressing as that which I have described still in use at Ouldja, the other arts and crafts of its Berber people were exactly similar to those which we have noted in the course of our journeys in the western Aurès; we had merely amplified

some of our existing information, therefore, when we moved on from the little village, and, leaving our genial young host, the Kaïd's son, to ride back to Khanga, started over a hilly country towards the village of Chebla in the territory of the Kaïd of Alieness.

Avoiding the détour which would have been caused by following the course of the Wed el Arab beside the banks of which Chebla, like Ouldja, lies, we rode over a very hilly and barren country in brilliant sunshine, the glare of which upon the almost naked rocks and steep crumbling hillsides was untempered by the sight of vegetation which would have provided a welcome rest to our eyes.

As we surmounted various hillocks that lay in our path we obtained distant views to the northward of the wooded slopes of some of the central Aurès peaks, but all around us lay a country as desolate as any part of the great desert, the ridge of the Djebel Cherchar, its steep slopes rising wellnigh sheer a few miles distant to the south-east, wearing no such mantle of woodland as the hills above the Wed Abdi or Menaa. As we came in sight of Chebla we noticed beside a brook which had to be forded before the village could be reached a group of natives, one of whom was wearing the scarlet cloak of a Kaïd, and we learned that the chief of the area of Alieness, whose residence lay upon the other side of the Djebel Cherchar, had decided to meet us at Chebla and to make a small tour of his territory in our company.

Having gone through the formality of greeting our new host and the elders of the village council of Chebla, who accompanied him, we rode on up the slope on the summit of which, overlooking a bend in the Wed el Arab, the hamlet of Chebla stands. Here we found that the Kaïd had procured a fair-sized house for us to live in, the property of an orphan boy named Mohammed the

Little, a cheery lad some twelve years old, who became our companion in our wanderings about the village.

Owing to the fact that Chebla is built upon the more or less level top of a small hill, rather than upon a narrow spur from a mountain, there is no lack of space in which to build; its houses, therefore, are larger and more rambling than the cottages of the Rassira cañon or the Wed Abdi, the majority of them boasting a courtyard and a separate apartment for such animals as goats, etc., which are accustomed to live indoors in the Aurès.

Five rooms, two of them quite large and furnished with a daïs at one end, as well as a small shed to serve as a stable, opened out from our courtyard, one side of the yard itself being partly roofed over and separated from the rest of it by a wall about three feet high to provide a sheltered corner in which cooking could be carried on without making a fire in one of the rooms, or in which the women could weave in hot weather.

The houses, built of untrimmed stone, seemed none of them to possess an upper floor, and, as they adjoined one another, their flat roof, devoid of any sort of parapet, formed a platform by means of which one could walk all round the village, looking down upon the inhabitants in their courtyards below.

This, indeed, is actually done, and we ourselves wandered about the roofs to visit the various friends we made in the place in a manner which would have scandalized an Arab, could one have seen us, and probably caused him to make many totally unjust remarks about the virtue of the Shawia women and the, to him, outrageous conduct of their husbands in allowing such behaviour.

The Berbers, as we have seen, are far less strict in their treatment of their women than the Arabs, yet I have never seen the housetops used as a sort of promenade



OUR HOUSE AT CHEBLA.



KHEIRANE.





in any of the other districts of the Aurès. Upon the roof of our house, as upon those of most of its neighbours, stood a line of beehives, covered with pieces of halfa-grass matting, and protected from the effects of the "evil-eye" by a gleaming white jawbone of a mule suspended from the roof below them, for the superstitions of the Djebel Cherchar appear to be those of the rest of the Aurès.

As soon as we arrived in Chebla the assistance of our medicine chest was called in for a couple of young men, both of whom appeared to be suffering from pneumonia, one of them so ill as to be quite beyond any help we could give him. In the night following he died, the heart-rending wails of the women of his family breaking the stillness of the night as he breathed his last, for the women make a point of demonstrating their sorrow as much as possible, uttering piercing cries, and often drawing blood from their cheeks by tearing them with their nails in a real or assumed agony of grief.

Our other patient, however, began slowly to improve, and when we left the village he was, I think, on the road to recovery, not owing to any medical skill on our part, but rather to the various little comforts we were able to find for him, and to the fact that we encouraged him to make a fight for life, for natives are very apt to resign themselves to a death which they consider inevitable even when they are not seriously ill at all.

A good deal of our time at Chebla, when we were not partaking of the "mechwis" which our host, the Kaïd, placed before us with embarrassing regularity, was spent in wandering about the gardens in the wide valley on the other side of the Wed el Arab overlooked by the village, gardens in which the date-palms of the lower and more southern villages had given place to fruit,

olive, and fig trees, and to wider fields of corn and beans, for at Chebla there is more space available for cultivation than at Ouldja or Tebouia Hamed. Thus we were able to learn some details of the methods of farmers in the Djebel Cherchar, methods indistinguishable from those of the basin to the north of the Rassira valley and other parts of the western Aurès. We also went over, accompanied by the Kaïd, to visit the "zawia" of two well-known marabouts, brothers belonging to the family of Abd el Hafed, who resided near the village of Kheirane, a few miles to the north.

Riding over a steep hill to avoid a bend in the stream—the Wed el Arab is very tortuous in its course—we found the village beside the river, the "zawia" consisting of quite a small village of huts, in addition to the residence of the holy men themselves, lying some three hundred yards lower down the stream, also upon its bank. The marabouts received us most cordially, bidding us "Welcome, with blessing," and conducted us over their settlement in the midst of which a large house, designed more or less upon a European plan, was in course of construction, our hosts expressing the hope that, upon the occasion of our next visit, we should occupy it ourselves. Indeed, I think the two brothers were a little hurt that we could not stay for a few days in the "zawia" then, for they pride themselves very much upon their hospitality, but in the circumstances this was not possible, in fact we could only spare one day to examine the village of Kheirane itself.

This hamlet, of some sixty huts, is built upon the steep slope of a rocky knoll, the opposite side of which consists of a sheer cliff, about one hundred and fifty feet high, overlooking the left bank of the Wed el Arab and the cornfields and gardens beyond the stream, a view that

is especially beautiful in the spring, when the green of the rising corn and the blossom of the fruit trees serve to relieve the monotony of the sombre groves of olives.

In many respects Kheirane may be said to resemble Beni Ferah, but I think the distant views obtainable from it are superior to those from the rocky knoll of the first Shawia village in which we had stayed, for from Kheirane is visible a fine panorama of the steep and barren slopes of the Djebel Cherchar, forming a most striking contrast to the beauty of its oasis. A day or two after our visit to Kheirane we left Chebla, and, still accompanied by our friend the Kaïd, proceeded eastwards towards the summit of the Djebel Cherchar at the southern end of its great ridge, on our way to a village of which we had heard much, Djellal, upon the eastern side of the mountain. The main slope of the mountain is approached from Chebla through a dry ravine, descending from the mountain to the Wed el Arab, after leaving which we found ourselves upon the very steep upper slopes of Cherchar, slopes of small stones and crumbling soil, from which larger rocks were to be seen projecting at all angles. The ascent was long and trying for our mules, but, when once we had reached the crest of the ridge, whence we obtained wonderful views of Chelia and other high peaks of the Aurès to the north-west and of the boundless desert to the south, we entered a more level country, a high-lying plateau sloping towards the south, leaving to the north of our path the highest portion of the great white ridge of the Djebel Cherchar, some six thousand feet above the sea. At the time of our passage the spring had called into being upon this high plateau numberless wild flowers, yellow, mauve, pink, white, and purple, while poppies glowed red in the fields of corn, which, to our surprise, we found in considerable

numbers upon the hill protected by a number of scattered stone huts, the majority of which were untenanted as we passed, being only inhabited at the time of the harvest, or when the heat of summer renders the low-lying villages, such as Chebla, almost unendurable even to the natives. We encountered quite a number of flocks of sheep and goats grazing upon the summit of the ridge, a country rather less barren than its western slopes, and we learned that these belonged to members of the Kaïd's tribe who, though belonging to the fair-haired Berber race, lived the life of nomads beneath their tents of goats' hair.

These Shawia, however, merely move up and down their own mountain, the Djebel Cherchar, according to the season, their country sufficing to keep life in their flocks without necessitating their removal to the northern plateau in the summer, so that the area over which they are obliged to wander is far less extensive than that of their Arab neighbours to the south.

Indeed, a very large proportion of our host's people reside in tents, a fact which accounts for the small number of villages to be found in the region we were traversing.

When we arrived at the Government "bordj" of Djellal, a building erected for the convenience of officials in the days of the military administration, and not a miniature hotel, such as those we had stayed in at Djémora and Menaa, we found ourselves upon the western slope of a fairly wide valley, running from the slopes of the Djebel Cherchar southwards towards the desert, great stretches of which were visible from the "bordj," but, although we looked out upon the back of the village, we could not realize until we had examined it from the east its truly remarkable situation, of which the Kaïd had told us so much.

Two spurs of rock project into the valley to which I

have referred from its western side, just below the point at which the valley opens out from the narrow gorge, through which its torrent flows down from the mountain.

Upon the larger of these spurs, a mighty mass of rock literally overhanging the fertile valley two hundred feet below it, stands the greater part of the village of Djellal.

Its houses built flush with the cliff edge, crevices in which are even bridged by logs whereon to rest their rough stone walls, unapproachable save along the neck of land which joins the spur to the hill on the western side of the valley, Djellal is invisible from any distance when approached from the north, for its buildings are indistinguishable from the rocks on which they stand. A certain number of houses, newer ones it seemed to us, stand upon the smaller spur to the north of the main village, and separated from it by a deep rocky chasm.

Djellal resembles some of the hamlets of the Rassira cañon more than those of any other of the Aurès valleys, and, though beneath the shadow of the Djebel Cherchar there lies no such mighty gorge as that to whose brink Ouled Mansour clings like an eagle's nest below the glowing slopes of Amar Khraddou, the scenery of its surrounding country is at least as fine. Standing upon a housetop in the main village of Djellal the traveller will find to the north a narrow gorge, beautiful enough if mean compared with that of the Rassira, while to the south, looking down the valley, in which the green of orchards and cornfields relieve the barren splendour of the scene, he will discover the low foothills on the edge of the Sahara, their slopes clothed at evening in the delicate shades of grey, pink, and purple, which we have seen to be characteristic of desert hills, and beyond them a vast panorama of the desert itself will be unfolded to his gaze.

Immediately below the crag upon which the main village stands the excellent track, which we have already noticed as leading from Khanga Sidi Nadji to the northward beneath the eastern wall of the Djebel Cherchar, winds around the rocky spur, and, crossing the stream below the village, ascends the opposite side of the valley on its way to the plateau to the north.

This track, which very little additional labour would render accessible to cars, was largely made by German prisoners during the war. The treatment accorded to these prisoners was of a kind which the Shawia could not in the least understand. To them an enemy is an enemy, whether a prisoner or not, and an enemy whose aggression has raised the price of anything which he himself may wish to buy is more of an enemy than any one else could possibly become; the fact that the prisoners were fed, therefore, still rankles in the native breast as an instance of European imbecility!

After spending sufficient time at Djellal to enable me to compare certain of its customs and its crafts with those of other portions of the Aurès massif, we left our hospitable friend the Kaïd and continued our way northward to the village of Taberdga, formerly the residence of the member of the Bel Hacine family who had ruled over the whole district of the Djebel Cherchar, and now the headquarters of an Assistant Administrator, who is in charge of the area we had traversed since arriving at Khanga Sidi Nadji.

The way itself was none too interesting when once intervening hills had hidden from our view the desert and its foothills to the south, and, though we passed a number of groups of tents, we found but one small hamlet on our way. The remarkable part of the journey only began when, after meeting the French official by the



THE CLIFF-TOP VILLAGE OF DJELLAL.

To face p. 223.





wayside, we turned eastward from the main track and approached the village of Taberdga itself.

Proceeding along the track from this point northward, a road quite suitable for carriages equipped with powerful springs, we suddenly found ourselves upon a hillside overlooking a deep basin, the junction of four ravines, in the midst of which a great knoll of rock, overlooking a number of gardens and an oleander-bordered stream beneath it, projected from the wall of the basin, to which it was linked by a rocky isthmus no more than ten yards wide.

Upon this knoll, huddled together in the small space available on its summit, lay the mosque and houses of Taberdga, while at a slightly lower level, upon the apex of the knoll or spur, stood a large rectangular building, somewhat prison-like in appearance owing to the scarcity of windows in its walls, the former residence of Bel Hacine. Descending into the basin, and passing close to the modern French dwelling and office of the Administrator, we commenced the ascent to the village itself.

The path, a good enough mule track upon which to ride, led around the rocky wall of the main basin, gradually ascending towards the isthmus, the rocks overhanging it in some places to such an extent that we found ourselves riding along a niche or cleft in the cliff, in which we were often obliged to lean almost upon the necks of our mules in order to keep our heads clear of the rocks above us. Beneath us an absolutely sheer drop of three hundred feet to the gardens and the stream caused us to bless the Providence that had made sureness of foot one of the attributes of the mule.

Upon the neck or isthmus itself we found such a drop on either hand, the path commanded by the gateway of the village, whose situation must have rendered it quite

impregnable in the days of old, and passing on through the gateway we reached the only narrow lane of this part of the hamlet, where the spur is too narrow to allow of further expansion.

Continuing our way through the village, in which many of its little stone-built cottages had fallen into disrepair, owing to the settled conditions of French rule which had enabled the Shawia to move into the valley from their homes in a natural fortress, we drew up at the large house of the former Kaïd, in which we were to be entertained by the present chief of the area.

This house, built under the direction of a European, was solid and, in its way, stately, for its rooms were large and lofty, its lack of windows, due to Arab requirements as to the seclusion of women, however, rendered it unsightly from without. Indeed, well built as it was, the house appeared singularly out of place in such close proximity to a picturesque cluster of Shawia dwellings, and, for the sake of the landscape, it had been better erected in a less conspicuous position than on the apex of the spur. Entertained most hospitably by the Administrator and the Kaïd, our days passed pleasantly enough, spent in wandering around the village, engaged in our usual occupation of trying to make friends among its inhabitants, or sitting, sheltered from the rays of the sun, beside a delightfully cool grotto, where a tiny stream fell from a height of a few feet into a pool in a little basin of rock with the sound of running water so enchanting to the ear of a wanderer in a barren land. But our life in this, the last, Shawia settlement we were to visit was devoid of incident, and we found no outstanding feature of native life which differed in any but the smallest detail from those we had noted elsewhere, many of which we have attempted to lay before the reader in the foregoing

pages. Indeed, our journey from desert to the plateau up the Djebel Cherchar, described in this chapter already too long, was more hurried than any of our previous wanderings in the hills, and had for its object rather the comparison of arts and crafts, manners and customs studied in the west with those of the eastern Shawia than a detailed examination of the latter. Little, then, of interest to the reader resulted from this expedition, nor is there any need to weary him with a description of a thirty-mile drive from Taberdga to Khenchela on the plateau, undertaken in a carriage obtained from the latter town, through the dreary scenery of a broad valley, the home of a nomad Berber tribe, after which we gained the railway at Batna in a commonplace motor 'bus.

But there is one point about the area described in this chapter, at least such of it as lies to the east of the Djebel Cherchar, to which we may once more call attention, and that is the track, I had almost said the road, which runs from Khanga Sidi Nadji to Djellal Taberdga and the north.

I believe that the greater part of this track is even now passable to wheels, indeed, as I have pointed out, we ourselves covered the northern portion of it in a carriage, so that, perhaps, to-day the quiet and delightful oasis of Khanga, the eerie-like hamlet on the crags of Djellal, and the impregnable village of Taberdga may all be within the reach of the tourist without the discomforts of a prolonged journey on muleback.

And, no doubt, in the near future this way will be opened to cars. But the traveller who desires to explore in a carriage the villages described in this chapter will be well advised to ascertain from the French authorities whether or no the road is clear before setting out on his journey. Here, then, at Taberdga at the moment

when we cease for the time being our investigations in the hills, we will bid the reader farewell in the very faint hope that in our efforts to lead him through the valleys of the Aurès and to point out to him some of the quaint old customs of the Shawía, customs which cannot indefinitely resist the advance of Western civilization and ideas, we may have aroused in him a spark of that interest which the hill-folk of Algeria long since kindled in ourselves, and which successive visits to the mountains have fanned into a flame.

## APPENDIX I

### HINTS TO TRAVELLERS IN THE AURÈS

**I**T is hoped that the following brief hints on outfit, etc., suitable for journeys in the Algerian hills will enable the traveller to arrive in the country equipped with at least the necessities for his expedition.

1. SEASONS.—The Autumn or the Spring, by which latter is meant the months of March and April, are the most suitable for travelling in the Aurès massif, though the high-lying villages could be visited as late as the early summer, while the lower southern slopes of the range and the oases, such as Djemora, Mechounech, and Khanga Sidi Nadji, which lie at their feet, should not as a rule prove too cold even in mid-winter.

2. CLOTHING.—The traveller to the hills or to El Kantara and even Biskra should provide himself with garments such as he would wear during an English autumn, for nights are often cold, and the wind sometimes blows chill from the snow-clad peaks in winter.

A warm overcoat is essential, especially for those who proceed up-country from Algiers by car, for snow is to be expected upon the high central plateau of Algeria.

For journeys in the hills, such as those I have attempted to describe, a change of warm clothing, in which the traveller can ride (ladies will find it wise to ride astride

along the narrow mountain paths), a good overcoat, and a shady hat appear to be the only essentials.

Those who travel in the Sahara as late as the end of March will probably find a *topee* a comfort, if not an absolute necessity. These can be bought cheaply at Biskra.

Tinted glasses will be found useful to those whose eyes are weak in the glare of the desert and the barren rocky hills.

We have long since discarded leather footgear, which is worn through in no time upon the rocks, in favour of canvas *boots* with rope soles, to which extra soles of motor tyre are stitched by a native cobbler at El Kantara. These, worn over two pairs of thick socks, will be found to lessen the jar to the feet in walking over stony ground, to give an excellent grip of the smooth rocks when climbing, and to be noiseless (a great advantage to the hunter). In addition they are cheap, and with three pairs of such boots the traveller should be equipped for a whole winter in the hills.

It is well to remember that, when staying at up-country inns, it is often impossible to find a laundress capable of starching collars and shirts, though ordinary washing can always be done in such places.

3. EQUIPMENT.—Living in the huts of the Shawia, we have never required tents in the hills. These, however, are necessary for shooting expeditions in uninhabited areas, and can be hired at El Kantara or Biskra, together with the necessary material for a camp. Should the traveller prefer to use his own tent, he will find that a double-roof is unnecessary, as rain is infrequent on the shooting grounds. Officers' sleeping valises, well provided with blankets, a couple of X-pattern chairs, a

*large* water-bottle (all purchased in England), and some cheap table-ware, a kettle, saucepan and spirit lamp, wherewith to prepare a meal in an emergency, complete the list of the equipment we have used.

4. SADDLERY.—In preference to taking out European saddles from England, which cannot be expected to suit every sore back they will encounter, we have used surcingles fitted with stirrups, which pass over the native pad or saddle upon the mule, and so hold it in position, as well as affording a rest for the feet.

Such a surcingle, adjustable from sixty to seventy-five inches, from shortest and longest hole to buckle, should serve for any Algerian mule.

5. STORES.—Those who intend to live upon native fare should provide themselves with a few stores, such as soup-squares, preserved meats, porridge, etc., for use if the Shawia cooking becomes intolerable.

Stores for the hunter in uninhabited areas can be arranged for by the hotel from which he starts, should he state his requirements in advance.

6. MAPS.—Excellent maps of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco can be obtained from Messrs. Carbonnel (late Adolphe Jourdan), Place du Gouvernement, Algiers, or from Messrs. Marcin at Biskra. A single sheet, to a scale of 1:800,000, is a convenient map of Eastern Algeria, while a far more detailed map (1:200,000) in seven sheets covers the area dealt with in this book.

7. EXPENSES.—There is no question connected with Algeria upon which it is so difficult to make a definite statement at the present moment, as upon the possible expenses of a journey in that country.

Prices of everything have risen to a very great extent from the very moderate rates current before the war, and they are as yet by no means stable.

The only advice that can be offered to the intending traveller is that he should make it a rule to *inquire the price of everything in advance* (a precaution which is neglected to an extraordinary extent), and that, upon learning the terms suggested by "guides" for hire of animals, camping, etc., he should refer these terms where possible to some local resident or committee (e.g. the Syndicat d'Initiative at Biskra) before accepting them. The native usually bases his charges upon his conception of the traveller's capacity to pay, and, it must be confessed, the carelessness in money matters of many tourists has encouraged this system to such a degree that prices have risen to an incredible extent since the war.

When I say that tourists have paid as much as two hundred and fifty francs a head per diem for camping tours, the reader will understand the necessity for caution in concluding bargains!

The traveller must haggle with the native, and, having haggled, should arrange his final terms in the presence of a European resident in Algeria with a view to avoiding discussion at the end of his trip.

As regards hotels, if some are expensive, there are plenty of others in the larger centres which are clean and comfortable, yet more moderate in their terms.



## APPENDIX II

### SPORT

THE very brief notes contained in this Appendix constitute an attempt to answer the questions so often put to me as to the possibilities for sport existing in the area described in the foregoing pages.

Of the various regions I have attempted to describe, the desert and the hills around El Kantara are the most likely to attract the attention of the sportsman.

The greatest prize which can fall to the hunter's rifle in south-eastern Algeria is undoubtedly the Barbary sheep, the *Ovis Lervia* of scientists, the "aroui" or "feshtal" of the Arabs, miscalled the "moufflon" by the French.

This great sheep, which sometimes stands more than forty inches at the shoulder, is remarkable for the very heavy fringe of long hair upon the throat, chest, and knees of the rams, whose massive horns curve outwards and backwards, but rarely attain a greater length than twenty-five or twenty-six inches, though according to Rowland Ward's *Records of Big Game*, a thirty-three inch head has been obtained.

The ewes are smaller than the rams, but, owing to the fact that they carry similar, though smaller, horns and fringes, it is difficult enough to distinguish the sexes when seen upon the hillside. Sheep are to be found upon several of the hills around El Kantara (in 1914 I

shot one within sight of the inn upon the cliffs of Metlili), but they are very hard to approach, for, although the climbing in the country around El Kantara is not so difficult as climbing can be in some of the haunts of mountain game, it none the less requires a steady head and a sound wind on the part of the sportsman, and a stalk is often liable to interference owing to the frequent presence of shepherds roaming over the mountain-side with their flocks.

It appears that sheep are in the habit of moving from one range to another if much disturbed, even crossing many miles of intervening country on their way, so that choice of a hunting-ground must be left until the sportsman has been able to ascertain from local natives the most likely hills at the time he proposes to start out. Two species of gazelles are also obtainable from El Kantara, and can even be killed without sleeping a night away from the inn. These are *Gazella Cuvieri*, the "edmi" of the Arabs, whose *habitat* is confined to the Barbary States, where it haunts the slopes of the hills which fringe the desert, and thus, to some extent, encroaches on the ground of the sheep, and *Gazella Dorcas*, in Arabic "ghazal," the beautiful little gazelle of the plains to be found from Morocco to Syria, from the Mediterranean to the Sudan. This animal, though properly a denizen of the plains, is also to be found upon the lower slopes frequented by the "edmi."

The two gazelles will be found to be almost, if not quite, as difficult to approach as the sheep. This is largely due to the lack of cover in the stony desert, and to the remarkably changeable character of the wind in the broken ground which they inhabit.

The method of hunting which I have always adopted for the three animals is substantially the same.

Leaving the inn (or my camp if I have wandered far in search of sport) before dawn with one Arab shikari, a mule, and a native muleteer, I conceal the mule with its man in the dry bed of a stream in the desert, or at the foot of the hill I am about to search for game. The shikari and I then proceed to work carefully over the ground, and, concealing ourselves upon some coign of vantage, search the country with our glasses in an endeavour to find animals feeding before they lie down for the day.

Once the game is seen the stalk begins over trying and difficult ground, and, if successful, terminates in a shot which is often long and usually at moving game. The remaining animals to be found near El Kantara, the striped hyena, the jackal, and the fox, are scarcely like to tempt the sportsman, while the other game animals of Algeria must be sought further afield; the addax antelope far down in the Sahara, around Wargla; the "rhim," or Loder's gazelle, among the sand dunes of the great desert; the Barbary stag (the only representative of the deer family to be found in Africa), near Tebessa, or around Collo on the coast; the leopard, among the wooded hills near the shores of the Mediterranean; while the boar, *Sus Scrofa* of the naturalists, occupies many of the wooded districts of Algeria, including the higher parts of the Aurès massif.

Several natives of El Kantara are accustomed to acting as shikari to European sportsmen, all of whom are keen and hardworking, but one of them seems to possess a wider knowledge of the habits of game and greater aptitude in stalking it than the rest, namely my old friend Si Amar.

I have always found that this man, if left alone and not worried by futile suggestions from his employer

(who, after all, cannot know the ground as a native knows it), can be relied upon to find game if game is to be found, and to approach it if it is approachable. What shikari can do more?

The method of hunting boar which I have found to be the most satisfactory is to obtain the services of one or two Shawia who possess dogs properly trained to hunt these animals.

The sportsman and his native companions search for fresh tracks of the animals beside some watering-place, and, when these are found, lay on the dogs, which run mute until they actually get a view of their quarry, when they give vent to short sharp yelps.

Pursuing the boar as he makes off through the woodland, yelping as they run, the dogs will soon bring him to bay, and thus enable the sportsman to come up and obtain a shot.

As regards a rifle for use in hunting any of the game of El Kantara, or the hills, I think any of the modern high-velocity small bores will be found suitable; I have used a .256 and a .303. The rifle should be light and fitted with a sling. No permit is required to import a rifle or shot-gun as personal luggage into Algeria, but the importation of ammunition is prohibited unless special permission for it has been obtained from the Governor-General. Shot-gun cartridges can be purchased in the country, but it is absolutely necessary that the sportsman should bring with him the few rounds he will require for his rifle. These he cannot obtain in Algiers.

Upon arrival at Algiers the sportsman must procure, at the Prefecture, a shooting licence, costing twenty-eight francs, which entitles him to kill any game to be found in the country except the Barbary stag, to shoot which,

I believe, a special permission from the Governor-General is required.

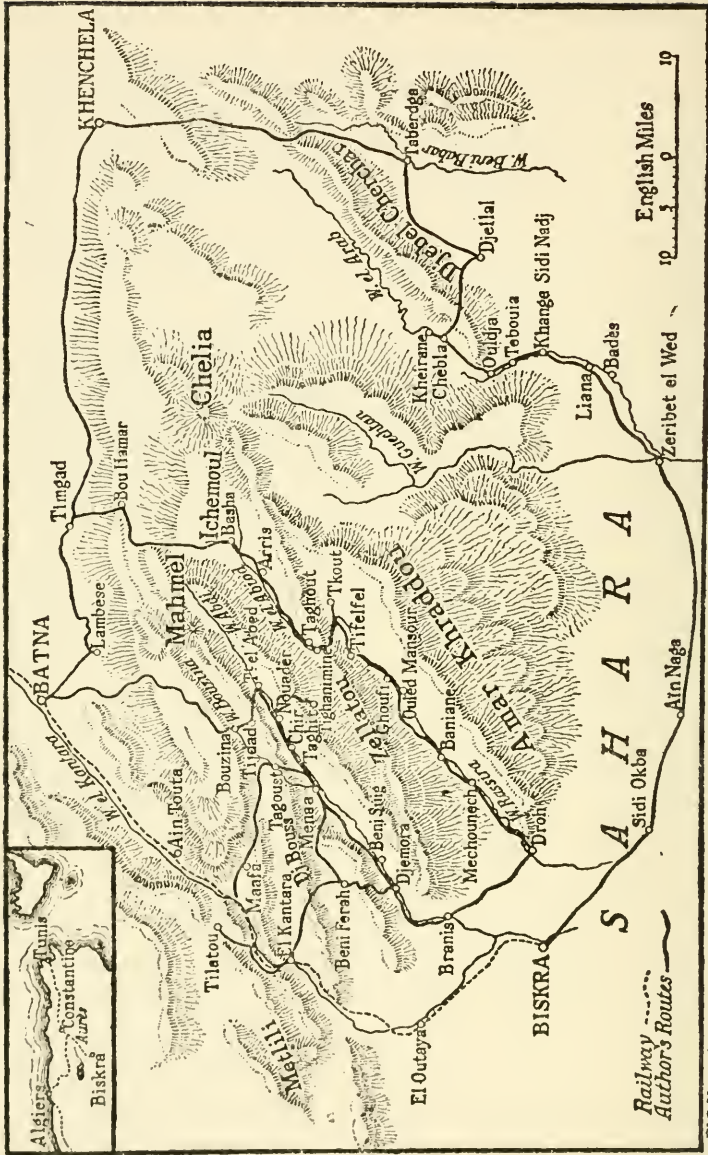
The equipment required for a shooting expedition differs in no respect from that already described as being desirable for a journey in the Aurès, save that the general coloration of clothes and hat should be light khaki or fawn for use in the desert, or among the barren rocks of the sheep hills. The canvas boots I have mentioned will be found excellent for hunting.

Most of the Algerian shikaris can skin trophies if carefully supervised (Si Amar does so quite well), and skins will be found to dry quickly in the shade if treated merely with cold wood ashes. Up to now my own trophies from El Kantara have reached England in perfect condition, doubtless owing to the dryness of the desert climate.

In conclusion I will attempt to answer the general question: "Is it worth while to take my rifle to Algeria?"

This question is very often put to me, and is by no means easy to answer, for the reply must depend upon the temperament of the questioner. Briefly my answer is as follows. Sport is certainly obtainable, but Algeria is no country for the mere "gunner."

The sportsman, the man who can appreciate a long stalk under difficult conditions, with the bare possibility of a difficult shot at the end of it, and who can enjoy the pure crisp air of the desert, its great open spaces, the freedom of its life and the companionship of enthusiastic native hunters, may confidently look forward to a pleasant shooting trip from El Kantara; the person whose sole delight is to be found in the magnitude of his bag had better, for his own sake as well as for that of the country, leave his rifle at home.



SKETCH-MAP OF THE AURÈS.

W.C.H. 1921

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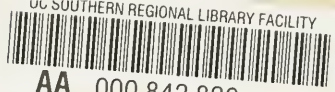
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